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**IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT
TO THE UNITED STATES**

by

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December 2009

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the threat, if any, posed to the United States by the Iranian nuclear program. Specifically, it addresses whether Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology is likely to represent a threat for homeland defense (direct use of nuclear weapons) or homeland security (indirect use of nuclear weapons through intermediaries). It begins with an overview of the cooperation and conflict between the U.S. and Iran on a number of issues, but primarily in regard to nuclear technology. Next, it addresses Iranian intentions, motivations, and rationality for developing nuclear technology. The possible employment options for Iranian nuclear weapons are then reviewed and assessed in terms of their likelihood based on historical models of deterrence derived from the U.S.-Soviet relationship during the Cold War (direct use), as well as theoretical models of Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons (indirect use). It appears that Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology results from a combination of security concerns, pride, prestige, and a desire for regional leadership. Iran has rational motivations for pursuing nuclear technology; therefore, U.S. leaders should approach Iran as a rational actor in order to avert further conflict between the two states.

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I. THE U.S.–IRANIAN QUAGMIRE: THE INTENT OF IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

A. INTRODUCTION

American-Iranian relations throughout the last thirty years have been mired in mutual mistrust and outright hostility. This history has colored the way in which United States policymakers and even academics view Iran’s attempt to acquire nuclear capabilities. An understanding of the potential threats from the Iranian nuclear program is important because the U.S. is currently driving an international effort to deny Iran the ability to develop its nuclear program. While war with Iran is not imminent, it is not entirely unforeseeable either. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate dispassionately our foreign policy options toward Iran. In the words of former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, “every day that passes brings Iran closer to building a bomb...the world cannot afford a nuclear Iran.”¹

Trita Parsi notes that “years of sanctions, international pressure and threats have not slowed Iran’s uranium enrichment,” nor prevented the Iranians from making great strides in developing other aspects of its nuclear program.² Therefore, one must consider if it can be deterred from its pursuit of nuclear technology in the first place. If it does acquire nuclear capabilities, can it be convinced that it is not in its best interests to weaponize this technology? Failing this objective, can Iran be deterred from using its nuclear weapons or passing them to nefarious organizations that would seek to harm the U.S. and its allies in the region?

The U.S. may soon face two options: a costly, difficult, and potentially destabilizing U.S. and/or Israeli military campaign to forcefully stop the Iranian nuclear

¹ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 267.

² International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran*, Middle East Briefing No. 28 (June 2, 2009), 1.

program from reaching military applicable levels, or an acceptance of a nuclear-armed Iran.³ Neither of these options is appealing to the international community at this time. But are Iran's nuclear efforts really a threat?

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis will look at two specific concerns in regard to Iran and its development of nuclear technology. First, does Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons represent a direct threat to the defense and security of the U.S. homeland? From a homeland defense perspective, how likely are the Iranians to directly attack the U.S. with nuclear weapons? Second, what is the likelihood that Iranian nuclear materiel could be distributed to terrorists who would seek to detonate them within the U.S., thus, impacting homeland security?

In answering these questions, there are several issues that must be addressed. First, what are the sources of Iranian identity and the roots of the on-going U.S.-Iranian conflict? This is important because it establishes not only who Iran is, but why the U.S. has had a hard time dealing with it on this issue, as well as sponsorship of international terrorism and Middle Eastern security issues in general. A better understanding of Iran should provide a foundation upon which to build a better answer to the overall research question.

Second, what is the status of Iran's nuclear program and why does it want nuclear technology at all? By looking at how urgent the problem of a nuclear-capable Iran is, if there is a problem at all, and assessing their likely motivations from both a best-case and a worst-case perspective, one can develop scenarios for potential Iranian use of nuclear technology. This is significant because if it is pursuing an immediate or future weapons capability, one must ask if Iran can be deterred from directly employing such weapons or passing them on to terrorist organizations. A valid concern since the U.S. has been targeted by terrorist organizations more than any other country in the world.⁴

³ "Military action against Iran would be extremely risky, and even if it were to succeed the cost would be staggering." Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 278.

⁴ Bruce Hoffman, *Countering the New Terrorism*, Ian Lesser, ed. (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999), 35.

Third, is Iran a rational actor? Existing theories of deterrence are based on the rationality of the parties involved; therefore, if Iran is not a rational actor in the classical sense, then existing theories may not provide an accurate framework from which to develop courses of action in dealing with them. There has been tremendous debate within the international community regarding Iran's perceived efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and the possible ramifications of such a move. While Iran has a history of provocative action and confrontation with the West, its acquisition of nuclear technologies (civil or military) might be explained in terms of normal state behavior based on the assumption that Iran is a rational actor and a new multi-polar world order is emerging in which states such as China and India will cut into America's current share of international power. This will affect Iran because it will challenge the current balance of power, possibly giving it a greater span of influence within the Middle East as compared to its Sunni rivals and Israel, all of whom have been benefactors of the current U.S. single super power status. By considering both sides of the argument regarding Iranian rationality and recognizing the emergence of a new balance of power in the international community, one can develop scenarios to assess the potential threat Iranian nuclear weapons might pose to the U.S., assuming it successfully develops and fields such weapons.

If Iran is in fact a rational actor, then its reasons for possibly wanting nuclear weapons capability can be understood and dealt with. The debate about pragmatism and rationality in Iranian foreign policy will be explored in order to help develop this consideration. From Iran's perspective, nuclear weapons may provide protection from regional and global forces that exert pressure to constrain their actions. Such pressures likely include Iran's encirclement by the U.S., the Israeli nuclear weapons program, the Pakistani nuclear weapons program, domestic motivations, and the growing notion that to be a great power, a state must possess nuclear weapons.⁵ Iran has lived under sanctions and threat of attack since the theocratic regime came to power in 1979, and it may be logical for them to seek means of increasing their state security and international standing

⁵ Abbas Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East," *The Nonproliferation Review* Vol. 13, No. 3 (November 2006), 584–586.

through nuclear technology. If Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons capabilities can be explained in terms of countering real or perceived threats to the state, increasing state prominence in the international community, and attainment of hegemonic power in the Middle East, then they are truly rational actors and historical and theoretical models can be applied to assess their potential threat to the U.S. This is not to say that a nuclear-armed Iran will not have other consequences: a regional arms race and a need for so-called nuclear umbrellas covering nonstate actors are potential scenarios to consider, but these concerns will be left for others to address.⁶

Fourth, under what circumstances would Iran use nuclear weapons if it develops them? Models of deterrence exist to contain direct and indirect usage of nuclear weapons, but if Iranian motivations differ from those of historical actors, then previous understanding about the rules of nuclear brinkmanship may not apply. This raises the final problem addressed in the thesis: can Iran be deterred from using nuclear weapons? If Iran is a rational actor legitimately pursuing a nuclear weapons program, then Cold War models should help us assess the potential options for deterrence against aggression from Iran. A theoretical model based on what has been observed thus far with Pakistan can be used to evaluate the same things in the realm of state sponsorship of nuclear terrorism.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In exploring the history of the U.S.-Iranian relationship, one finds periods of both conflict and cooperation. Iran has a long history of powerful nationalist sentiment in a sea of hostile regimes. Being the center of Shi'ite Islam in a region dominated by Sunni elites has driven the current leadership to carve out a niche for Iran as a regional power to be respected in today's globalized world.⁷

⁶ Scott Sagan notes that the term "nuclear umbrella" is a misnomer: umbrella implies coverage, such as would be provided by an antiballistic missile system, when it actually refers to a promise of retaliation from a third party. Scott Sagan, "The Case for No First Use," *Survival* 51, No. 3 (June–July 2009), 168.

⁷ Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Power and Paradox in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 81.

Iran's greatest source of wealth and attention in modern times stems from its natural resources: primarily oil and natural gas. Ray Takeyh points out that oil price and availability were significant factors in U.S. and British interventions in the country after World War II.⁸ Western desires to ensure a relatively cheap and reliable flow of oil contributed to the overthrow of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and replacement of pro-Western rule in his place. Mark Gasiorowski's "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran" chronicles the events leading up to the coup, as well as its aftermath. U.S. and British actions to secure access to oil and to prevent Soviet incursion into the Persian Gulf soured U.S.-Iranian relations to this day.⁹ Such intervention was considered unacceptable to many Iranians, especially Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and became Iran's Supreme Leader until his death in 1989. Such a radical development was of grave concern to the West in and of itself, but the Iranian hostage crisis that shortly followed further soured U.S.-Iranian relations as 52 Americans were held for 444 days.¹⁰

The event—a defining moment for Iran and a traumatic one for the U.S. — capped a process that saw the overthrow of one of Washington's closest regional allies and the loss of a major strategic location, at the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East.¹¹

Interestingly, the origins of Iran's nuclear program stem from the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, when U.S.-Iranian relations were very good. The U.S. was initially very instrumental, often leading the way and brokering the deals, in Iranian acquisition of nuclear technologies until the Iranian Revolution overthrew the Shah in 1979.¹² Mustafa Kibaroglu notes that the Iranian nuclear program began in 1957 with the signing of the Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms (or Atoms for

⁸ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 90.

⁹ Mark Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 1987), 261–286.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs: The West and Iran's Quest for Nuclear Power," *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring 2006), 207.

Peace Program).¹³ The program was an initiative of the Eisenhower administration in order to strengthen U.S.-Iranian technical, academic, social, and economic ties. It provided for installation of U.S. equipment in Iran, the supply of technical training to Iranian scientists, and provisions for a supply of fuel to power a series of nuclear reactors. The ultimate goal of these closer ties was to create a stable Iran to maintain order in the Gulf, be friendly to U.S. interests in the region, and deny the Soviets influence over the region's oil supply and strategic locations.

While there is no doubt that Iran is pursuing a nuclear program, it is not certain that this program is intended for military purposes. The U.S. overstated the presence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction prior to its 2003 invasion, so how reliable are its current estimates of the Iranian program? McCreary and Posner caution policymakers from overestimating the accuracy of consensus intelligence because it requires one to place a considerable amount of faith in the assumptions underlying speculation about Iranian intentions.¹⁴ Miller notes that there is an “odd and erratic mix of progress and failure, cooperation and collision, transparency and obduracy, concessions offered and concessions retracted” that frustrates international efforts to understand what Iran is doing and where it currently stands in regard to its pursuit of nuclear technology.¹⁵

It should also be considered why Iran is pursuing any type of nuclear technology at all. From the alarmist perspective, one need only look to the comments of politicians such as George W. Bush. In January 2008 he referred to Iran as “a threat to world peace” for both its support of international terrorism and its alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons.¹⁶ According to Abbas Kadhim, however, Iranian motivations for nuclear technology may stem not from belligerent foreign policy ambitions, but rather from efforts to counter perceived pressures from potentially hostile states such as the U.S.,

¹³ Kibaroglu, “Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs,” 213.

¹⁴ John McCreary and Richard Posner, “The Latest Intelligence Crisis,” *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 23, No. 3 (June 2008), 371–380.

¹⁵ Steven Miller, “Proliferation Gamesmanship: Iran and the Politics of Nuclear Confrontation,” *The Syracuse Law Review* Vol. 57, No. 551 (2006–2007), 553.

¹⁶ “Bush Calls Iran ‘Threat to World Peace,’” *CNN.Com*, January 9, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/01/09/us.iran/index.html> (accessed June 11, 2009).

Israel, or any of its Sunni neighbors, such as nuclear-armed Pakistan.¹⁷ Such pressures stem from U.S. military power in the region, nuclear-armed Israel, a potentially unstable regime in Pakistan, domestic motivations, and international prestige. Steven Miller points to four possible scenarios that could underlie Iranian nuclear efforts:¹⁸ the desire to immediately field nuclear weapons, the desire for a nuclear weapons option in the event of future conflict, a desire for international prestige, or internal motivations supporting technical progress.

Complicating an assessment of these issues is the debate about Iranian rationality. In the formal sense, rational action is considered to be:

An Enlightenment tradition in which politics are distinct from religion, the individual is the relevant unit of analysis, and behavior is understood as the pursuit of self-interested goals where the actor is expected to have extensive knowledge of alternative means and consequences.¹⁹

For the purposes of this thesis, rationality will be focused more specifically: a state that uses cost/benefit calculations over ideological considerations when making foreign policy decisions. If Iran is a rational actor, then their behavior can be explained, predicted, and managed using existing models. If they are not, then all of the previous rules related to nuclear deterrence and brinksmanship may be out of date and no longer apply. But is Iran rational? One might question the rationality of a theocratic regime in general, but especially one like Iran, which is well known for its fiery anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric. After all, inflammatory rhetoric has been attributed to current Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad including:

Today, [Zionists] have created a myth in the name of the Holocaust and consider it to be above God, religion and the prophets ... If you [Europeans] committed this big crime, then why should the oppressed Palestinian nation pay the price? You have to pay the compensation yourself.²⁰

¹⁷ Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," 581–589.

¹⁸ Miller, "Proliferation Gamesmanship," 595–598.

¹⁹ Roxanne Euben, "When Worldviews Collide: Conflicting Assumptions About Human Behavior Held by Rational Actor Theory and Islamic Fundamentalism," *Political Psychology* Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 1995), 157–178.

²⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 264.

On the other hand, while writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh assert that:

Iran is not, in fact, seeking to create disorder in order to fulfill some scriptural promise, nor is it an expansionist power with unquenchable ambitions...not unlike Russia and China, Iran is a growing power seeking to become a pivotal state in its region.²¹

Even former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani has said:

We have made inappropriate measures or never made any measures. And we have delayed making decisions. Our Ideology is flexible. We can choose expediency on the basis of Islam.²²

The results of such a review might point to the conclusion that Iran is in fact pursuing nuclear weapons. Such a conclusion does not mean, however, that Iran has a specific intent to employ those weapons immediately against a global or regional rival, nor does it necessarily mean that a transfer to terrorists is imminent. So far, only the U.S. has ever developed such weapons with a target in mind already: the Axis Powers during World War II. If Iran does in fact have a target in mind for nuclear weapons (either immediately or in the event of future conflict), then they must be delivered through one of two general ways: direct use or indirect use. Direct use of nuclear weapons can be analyzed using Graham Allison's rational actor paradigm as described in *Essence of Decision*. He asserts that to be rational, states must: (1) be unitary actors; (2) calculate the risks and benefits of actions prior to action, then choose the most beneficial course of action; (3) recognize the reality of an anarchical international system; and (4) pursue security through power.²³ If they possess nuclear weapons and employ them against another state that also possesses nuclear weapons, then there is a reasonable expectation that they will face a retaliatory strike from the targeted state, therefore their nuclear stockpiles become a deterrent against aggression. Is Iran willing to risk a nuclear war? If so, for what reason would they do so and can they be deterred? Jeffrey Lewis provides

²¹ Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 87, No. 1 (January/February, 2008), 85-94.

²² Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 263.

²³ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), 27-28.

four points necessary for deterring Iran from nuclear attacks.²⁴ The U.S. should ensure that Iran knows it will remain at a disadvantage both in conventional and nuclear arms, use detailed deterrent language to make U.S. response doctrines clear, reaffirm security commitments to allies potentially targeted by Iran, and define the terms of an acceptable relationship between the two countries.

But what about providing nuclear weapons to intermediaries? Such a question raises the notion of indirect use of nuclear weapons and a brief discussion on nuclear terrorism. Iran has a long history of supporting terrorist organizations. Benjamin Netanyahu, Alireza Jafarzadeh, Ray Takeyh, and numerous other statesmen and scholars all agree that Iran is one of the world's leading state sponsors of terrorism.²⁵ If they are such a willing supplier of arms, equipment, and training for nonnuclear terrorists, then under what circumstances would they add nuclear support to the list and can they be deterred from doing so? Graham Allison points out:

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union each knew that an attack against the other would elicit a retaliatory strike of commensurate or greater measure; but [terrorist organizations have] no such fear of reprisal.²⁶

The country that provides terrorist organizations nuclear materials should however have fear of reprisal. Allison argues that a more comprehensive structure is necessary to add greater credibility to the deterrence aspect of preventing nuclear terrorism, but a rudimentary system is in existence now.²⁷

²⁴ Jeffrey Lewis, "Assumptions Underlying the Debate on Deterring Emerging Nuclear States," *Deterring the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran*, Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, eds. (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2007), 20–23.

²⁵ Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies Can Defeat Domestic and International Terrorism* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1995); Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis* (New York: Palgrave, 2008); and Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*.

²⁶ Graham Allison, "Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Terrorism," *Technology Review* Vol. 111, No. 6 (November–December 2008), 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

D. THESIS OVERVIEW

The basic analytic approach for evaluating the question of the Iranian nuclear threat to the U.S. is to look at several historical and theoretical models, compare their similarity to the current situation, and then draw conclusions based on precedent. The two primary cases that will be applied are the Cold War and the nuclear state of Pakistan.

This thesis will look at the historical model of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. relationship during the Cold War. Both nations possessed nuclear weapons (as the U.S. does now and Iran may someday) and an adversarial relationship (as the U.S. and Iran have had since 1979), yet there was never a nuclear exchange between the two. The Cold War scenario illustrates the rational actor principle in international relations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. and may be used to assess Iran's likelihood of employing nuclear weapons directly against another state, primarily the U.S., if Iran is evaluated to actually be a rational actor.

This example has several parallels between the current U.S. and Iranian situation today. First, there is a history of cooperation. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were allies during World War II, just as the U.S. and Iran enjoyed positive relations under the Shah for a number of years. Second, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. conflict developed over competitive interests and ideological visions of the world order, just as the U.S.-Iranian relationship soured over the level of U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of Iran and competing political, religious, and social ideologies. Finally, the U.S. enjoyed a distinct military advantage over the U.S.S.R. until the Soviet Union developed nuclear weapons, just as the U.S. enjoys military advantage over Iran now. If and when Iran successfully develops and fields nuclear weapons, the situation will be even more similar in that a mutually prohibitive level of destruction may become available to both countries, thereby establishing a new Cold War relationship between the two.

The second case used to evaluate the possibility of indirect use of nuclear technology (passing nuclear weapons to a surrogate agent, most likely a terrorist organization) is Pakistan. Pakistan is the only Muslim state to develop nuclear weapons. Despite being a relatively poor state with continuous periods of political instability,

military coups, and internal ideological fissures, Pakistan's nuclear weapons have not been passed to terrorist organizations for the sake of economic profit, political advantage, or ideological support.

In terms of passing nuclear weapons to nonstate actors, Pakistan is the closest country to which Iran can be compared for several reasons. First, Pakistan is the only Islamic state to develop nuclear weapons. This is significant considering Iran is a theocratic Shi'ite regime, thus, creating a potential proliferation motivation for countering Pakistan's Sunni bomb with a Shi'ite bomb of its own. Second, Pakistan has long ties with nonstate actors such as the Afghanistan mujahedeen during the Soviet occupation and numerous ties between Pakistani intelligence and radical groups in Kashmir.

Iran, like Pakistan, has long been recognized as a major supporter of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and various sectarian groups in Iraq. Finally, both Pakistan and India, Pakistan's regional rival, possess nuclear weapons and have been involved in ongoing overt and covert military conflict for an extended period. Iran's primary regional adversary is Israel: a country that possesses nuclear weapons, as well as a history of overt and covert conflict with Iran. In this thesis, Pakistan is considered to be a theoretical model rather than a historical model because of its short time as a nuclear power and the evolving nature of its power structure. Inferences about parallels between Pakistan and Iran must be made on the relatively short trends in Pakistan, rather than long standing, relatively stable political structures like the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. possessed during the Cold War.

This thesis will begin with an overview of the history of U.S.-Iranian conflict focusing on the history of Iran, the rise and fall of the Shah, and early nuclear technology cooperation. The next portion will evaluate the current assessment of the Iranian nuclear program to see how accurate current U.S. estimates appear to be. If in fact Iran is likely to be pursuing nuclear weapons, it is important to consider why they are and if they can be deterred from employing them. The next section seeks to address why Iran would want nuclear technology, both from civil and military perspectives. Next, it will look at both sides of the Iranian rationality debate. Finally, this thesis will develop and assess the two scenarios under which Iran could use nuclear weapons for something other than deterrence: direct use against another state (Cold War model) and transfer to intermediaries (Pakistani model).

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II. IRAN AND AMERICA: ROOTS OF CONFLICT

A. HISTORY AND IDENTITY

The current animosity between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran has its roots in the wealth of natural resources present in Iran, its strategic location along ancient trade routes and military access corridors between East and West, and its dominance over key terrain associated with transporting the world's oil supply. Iranian nationalism combined with Shi'ism has led to the emergence of a proud people with a desire for self-determination that often challenges Western ideas for the position and direction of the Middle East.²⁸ By looking at the origins of the modern Iranian state, the turbulence of the twentieth century, and finally exploring the unique relationship between the U.S. and Iran in regard to the Iranian nuclear program, one can see the roots of conflict that have dug deep into the public perceptions and foreign policies of both countries. Such a study is crucial to understanding Iran's current nuclear technology motivations. Fariborz Mokhtari reminds us that:

When the foundation of a community's entire existence as a nation is based shared historical experiences, detachment from history equates denouncing one's identity.²⁹

B. IRANIAN NATIONALISM

The Persian Empire, the forerunner of modern day Iran, spread art, literature, architecture, and religion across the Middle East and beyond. Persian kings implemented measures to ensure a steady and accurate flow of information across the empire to include the construction of roads and the creation of a group of messengers similar to the American Pony Express who would carry messages from royally appointed inspectors back to the king.³⁰ These roads also served at least two other purposes. First, they were employed as trade routes that carried goods from all across the empire to diverse

²⁸ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 81.

²⁹ Fariborz Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back: Iranian Security Perceptions in Historical Context," *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 59, No. 2 (Spring 2005), 210.

³⁰ T. Walter Wallbank, et al., *History and Modern Life: The World and Its Peoples* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984), 36.

markets eager to receive exotic goods. Second, they ensured the ability of tax collectors to collect royal revenue and transport it to the king. To help manage the tax structure that emerged, a system of weights and measures were developed, along with a monetary system based on gold and silver coins.³¹ This created a cosmopolitan empire that set the standard for the nation-states that followed, as well as creating a foundation for Iranian cultural identity. Persian roads became lucrative trade routes between Europe and Asia, while gold and silver were replaced with oil in the modern age.

The glory of the Persian Empire came to an end at the hand of the Greek hero and conqueror Alexander the Great.³² The Greco-Persian Wars stemmed from the rebellion of Miletus, a Greek colony that had lived under Persian rule for 50 years.³³ The Greeks petitioned for assistance from the strong city-states of Athens and Sparta when the Persians moved to bring their rebellion to an end, thereby initiating a cycle of violence between the Hellenic League and the Persian Empire. Despite numerical superiority, the Persian Empire was defeated during the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.³⁴ This led to an ongoing conflict between Persia and Greece that brought about a back and forth series of military operations in which territory was gained and lost over several generations. Eventually, these back and forth campaigns culminated in the defeat of Persia by Alexander in 334 B.C.³⁵

Despite the eventual end of the Persian Empire, the glory of its history provides firm roots for the Iranian people. In historical accounts of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, the Iranian people find their heroes. In historical accounts of these leader's freedom and tolerance, they find their morality. In historical accounts of industrial and technical feats from the ancient world, they find their history. All of these factors combine to create an air of Iranian nationalism founded on the glories of the Persian Empire and its time as the dominant world power. This power was crushed by the Greeks: often identified as the

³¹ Wallbank, *History and Modern Life*, 36.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ Burton Beers, *World History: Patterns of Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hill, Inc., 1986), 91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁵ Wallbank, *History and Modern Life*, 97–98.

foundational culture on which all Western traditions are built. The historic East versus West conflict is playing out again today as Iran attempts to rise in power and America struggles to define itself in a uni-polar world.

Insensitivity to Iranian nationalism, instead of forcing Iranians to abandon their nuclear policy, runs the risk of turning it into a fiercely nationalistic crash program to acquire nuclear weapons at any cost.³⁶

As Ray Takeyh points out, Iran “has always perceived itself as the rightful leader of the Middle East.”³⁷ Trita Parsi summarizes it best:

Based on Iran’s geo-strategic position, natural resources, cultural strength, and population size in relation to that of its neighbors, the Shah believed that Iran was the natural hegemon in the Persian Gulf.³⁸

Iranian views of themselves and their rightful place as a regional leader is currently leading to a challenge of U.S. hegemonic power in the Middle East and a showdown over its nuclear program.

C. SHI’ISM

Religion, long a prominent issue in and around Persia, became a refuge for many Iranian citizens facing oppression and injustice from their rulers during the twentieth century. There was growing interest in Iran by Western powers in the early to mid-twentieth century due to its wealth of oil and strategic location. This interest led to increasing involvement in the internal affairs of Iran and the undermining of Iranian leadership in support of Western strategic interests. The most influential religious figure in Iran, if not the Middle East as a whole, in the twentieth century is Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His fiery rhetoric against the injustices of the Iranian elite, the White Revolution,³⁹ and the influence of Western powers on the internal affairs of Iran raised

³⁶ Mokhtari, “No One Will Scratch My Back,” 229.

³⁷ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 81.

³⁸ Trita Parsi, “Israel and the Origins of Iran’s Arab Option: Dissection of a Strategy Misunderstood,” *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 60, No. 3 (Summer 2006), 498.

³⁹ “A program of radical economic and social change that caused major unrest” implemented under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Peter Haggett, *Encyclopedia of World Geography, Volume 15* (Oxfordshire: Andromeda Oxford, 2002), 2,044.

him to prominence with disenfranchised masses in Iran who sought a better way of life and an escape from Iran's drive toward Western modernity. Khomeini was born in the small town of Khomein in 1902 and was vectored early on toward a career in theology.⁴⁰ His family is believed to be the direct descendents of Iman Musa al-Kazim, the seventh of twelve Imans dating back to the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah. He became the spiritual leader of the Iranian Revolution and was arrested in 1964 for inflammatory remarks about Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his regime's alleged desire to oppose Islam and repress the religious class.⁴¹ Khomeini served eight months in prison, then after his release began a public campaign of criticism against the Shah. This time the item of contention was the diplomatic immunity status awarded to U.S. military personnel and their families stationed in Iran. Despite being exiled to Turkey, then Iraq, and later France, Khomeini galvanized a resistance movement that acted to free Iran from Western involvement and the Shah's corruption. Eventually this resistance spilled into the streets of Iran and the government was forcibly removed from power in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of Iran and established a theocratic republic form of government to rule the country that is now formally known as the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Shi'ism has been a central feature of Iranian life since the time of the Arab conquests in 637 A.D. Shi'ism provides an ideological framework from which Iranians can draw strength and peace. It is central to their identity as a theocratic state and a source of deep commitment inherent in their collective national identity. As Takeyh points out, "as a religious minority, Shi'ites in Iran have always been suspicious and wary of their neighbors."⁴² This suspicion has led to an insulated community that seeks to protect itself from unnecessary influence at the hands of those who would serve their own self-interests above those of the Iranian community. When Muhammad died in 632 A.D., there was debate about who should lead the Muslim *umma* (community). Two camps developed regarding the source of legitimate transfer of authority to lead the Muslims.

⁴⁰ James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2007), 286.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁴² Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 81.

The first camp advocated the appointment of a new leader based on prestige, power, and seniority in Islam. The other camp advocated that it should be based on heredity; the leader should be the heir of Muhammad. The first camp won out and appointed Abu Bakr (Muhammad's close companion) over Ali (Muhammad's close companion, cousin, and son in law). This created a rift in the Muslim community that endures to this day in the form of the Sunni-Shi'a split. In its most basic terms, the split involves one's perception of the legitimacy of the first three *Caliphs* (head of the Islamic state). Sunnis accept that Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman were all legitimate, where the Shi'a (or *Shi'at-u-Ali*, party of Ali⁴³) consider Ali to be the first legitimate Caliph when he came to power in 656 A.D.⁴⁴ Through the rise and fall of numerous Muslim dynasties, the Shi'a continued to flourish in the land that became Iran, but they have remained politically and socially isolated from their Sunni neighbors.

D. WESTERN INTERFERENCE

Western interference in Iran begins with the build up to World War I. British colonization around the globe led them to an unprecedented degree of national wealth and a massive span of control that dominated the world. The jewel of the British Empire was India, a prize highly sought by rival colonial powers, especially Russia. Russian desires to expand its empire southward to reach warm water ports and British desires to maintain secure routes to India led to a period of espionage, intrigue, and imperial maneuvering known as the Great Game.⁴⁵ The British wanted to ensure strong, stable governments in strategic areas in order to prevent further Russian expansion. This led to British support of the Qajar Shahs, an unpopular and corrupt group who ruled Persia from 1794 until 1925.⁴⁶ With the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the importance of maritime trade, Persia had become a depressed area. The Qajars raised taxes and sold jobs in order to raise capital to keep their empire alive, but it was not enough. They then

⁴³ John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 37.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Bale, Class Lecture, *NS 3801: Introduction to Terrorism* (Naval Postgraduate School, 2009).

⁴⁵ Martin Ewans, et al., *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia, Volume 1* (Cornwall: Martin Ewans, 2004), 8.

⁴⁶ Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy 1831–1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

borrowed large sums of money from Europeans and created a major debt problem for Persia. This debt problem was made even worse when they sold exclusive resource licenses to British firms because the Persians effectively lost control of their own natural resources, thereby losing all means to raise capital to repay the loans.

Muzaffaru'd-Din Shah, facing growing internal pressures, eventually established a *Majlis* (Parliament) and developed a constitution to give the Persian people some degree of political power.⁴⁷ Further, he formally established Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion and allowed the creation of five religious scholars to ensure that all legislation met the tenants of *Sharia* (Islamic law).⁴⁸ Muzaffaru'd-Din Shah died shortly after these reforms went into place however and his successor, Mohammed Ali Shah, aided by British and Russian forces, destroyed the *Majlis* and restored the previous system of government. This provoked a radical response, which led to his overthrow and exile to Russia.

Russia and Britain put aside their imperial rivalry in the face of World War I to coerce Persia into joining the Allied powers. The move was strictly a matter of practicality because of their need for Persian oil and desire to pressure the Ottoman Empire. This alliance resulted in an Ottoman invasion of Persia that devastated the country. At the end of World War I, the Persian people were exhausted, starved, and demoralized, while the government was disorganized and no longer effective. This provided a golden opportunity for the British who stepped in to run Persia's army, finances, and control all aspects of trade under the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919.⁴⁹

Reza Khan Mirpanj became the Commander of the Persian military and Prime Minister in 1921, then in 1925 capitalized on domestic unrest over the Anglo-Persian Agreement to remove Ahmad Shah Qajar from power. He immediately set out to restore Persian glory and undo the harm done to his country by the Qajars. He revamped the domestic political order of the country and established Western notions of citizenship,

⁴⁷ Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (London: F. A. Praeger, 1965), 367.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

strengthened domestic infrastructure, and eliminated foreign influence on the Persian military. He also considered an alliance with Germany to provide an alternative to British and Russian influence on the country. It was also during this period that Persia became known as Iran, a derivative of the word Aryan, an ethnic group from Persia's past honored by the current German government. As the Second World War began, Iranian leaders were under pressure to choose between the Axis and Allied powers.

As far as the King, Reza Shah, was concerned Russia and Britain were not worthy of trust, the U.S. had proven unreliable to check Russian and British imperial ambitions, and Germany was just another foreign power with similar interests.⁵⁰

When he refused to join the Allies and attempted to maintain neutrality in order to escape the conflict, Britain and Russia invaded Iran and removed him from power, installing his son, Reza Shah Pahlevi, in his place.

The Cold War began immediately after World War II. This conflict drove most nations of the world to align with either the American or Soviet block. As Amin Saikal points out:

[Muslim countries] found themselves simply pawns in a global game in which they could play little or no role unless they attached themselves to one of the rival powers, or achieved the ability to play off the two powers in order to have a degree of autonomy in conducting their domestic and foreign affairs.⁵¹

U.S.-Soviet conflict began immediately over Iran. When Joseph Stalin refused to remove his troops from Iran, President Harry Truman threatened to send the U.S. military to remove them by force.⁵² This decision was eventually codified into the Truman Doctrine: a policy by which the U.S. would extend political, military, and economic aid to any democratic nation under threat from communist forces.⁵³ This eventually drove the Doctrine of Containment that motivated anti-communist U.S. foreign policy efforts

⁵⁰ Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back," 216.

⁵¹ Amin Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?*, 42–43.

⁵² Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 127–128.

⁵³ Robert Dallek and Sean Wilentz, *Harry S. Truman* (New York: Times Books, 2008), 56.

for many years to come.⁵⁴ U.S. strategic interests demanded access to oil and the denial of Soviet expansion into geographically strategic or resource rich areas. Into the midst of this came Mohammed Mossadegh. Ultimately he was a Persian nationalist who “believed that the resources of his nation should be owned and controlled by [the people of] his nation, not Britain.”⁵⁵ Following World War II, Iran was in desperate need of additional state income. The most likely source for this income was greater control over its domestic oil supplies. Iranian oil however was controlled by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, a firm that ensured British access to Iranian oil, but provided very little in the way of profit for the Iranian people. In 1951, the Iranian Majlis named Mossadegh Prime Minister in order to pursue nationalization of the Iranian oil industry. There were great expectations for him by Iranians because of “his genuine depth of emotion for the Persian people, combined with his keen mind, administrative skills, and Western education.”⁵⁶ This led to Britain refusing to buy Iranian oil and seizing Iranian assets in British banks. Mossadegh’s popularity soared inside Iran despite increasingly despotic domestic measures, but his actions created great concern in the West. This did not stop *Time* magazine from naming him as its ‘Person of the Year’ in 1951 however.⁵⁷ In 1953, Mossadegh’s hold on power was growing tenuous due to strains with his nationalist partners, Iran’s declining economic situation, and an opportunistic clergy.⁵⁸ Mossadegh then raised the possibility of Soviet intervention in the country’s affairs to restore order: this was perceived by the U.S. as a direct threat to its geopolitical and business interests in the region, and the final red line in their decision to take direct action.⁵⁹ To eliminate this perceived threat, the U.S. and Britain conspired to undermine his position in Iran

⁵⁴ Saikal, *Islam and the West*, 48–60.

⁵⁵ Zachary Shore, *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁷ See “Persons of the Year,” *Time.com*, <http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/personoftheyear/archive/stories/1951.html> (accessed August 27, 2009).

⁵⁸ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 85–95.

⁵⁹ Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’état in Iran,” 275–276.

with ‘Operation Bedamn.’⁶⁰ This operation called for a combination of guerilla warfare, espionage, and prewar coordination efforts to undermine pro-Soviet elements within Iran and the surrounding areas. When these actions failed to produce the desired results in a timely manner, and the Truman Administration (who had objected to earlier British plans for a coup d’état in Iran) was replaced by the Eisenhower Administration, a more aggressive strategy to remove him from power and restore Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to full power was put into action: ‘Operation Ajax.’⁶¹ This culminated in the removal of the “last popular, democratically oriented government to hold office in Iran.”⁶²

Western intervention in Iran has always been at the expense of the Iranian people. Whether it was their strategic location, valuable natural resources, or using them as cannon fodder in European wars, the Iranian people have been subject to the power plays of the great powers of the day. After experiencing such treatment, Iranian nationalism and Shi’ism become much more than abstract concepts: they become underlying foundations on which desires to escape Western influence and rise to great power status rest. As Ray Takeyh states:

To this day, many Iranians believe that an opportunity to forge a new independent and nonaligned foreign policy, employ natural resources for national development, and build democracy were all lost due to the machinations of a rapacious superpower.⁶³

Kristen Monroe and Lina Kreidie find three things that shape political identity that are especially relevant to Iran: canonical expectations, worldview, and view of self.⁶⁴ When applied at the societal level, their work highlights Iran’s perception that Western interference is the norm; thus, they are presented with a fundamental choice: resistance or

⁶⁰ Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’état in Iran,” 268–269.

⁶¹ “Operation Ajax was the CIA’s first successful covert ousting of a foreign leader.” Shore, *Blunder*, 76.

⁶² Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’état in Iran,” 261.

⁶³ He goes on to note that this charge is “exaggerated,” but “not without merit.” Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 84.

⁶⁴ Kristen Monroe and Lina Kreidie, “The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory,” *Political Psychology* Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 1997), 19–43.

acceptance. Most Iranians operate with a worldview that is different than those commonly held in the West, therefore their history creates a view of their nation that differs from that of America. These differing views have set Iran and the U.S. on a collision course over the future of the Iranian nuclear program.

E. NUCLEAR COOPERATION AND CONFLICT

It was after “Operation Ajax” and the Shah reasserted his power over Iran that the U.S. began a bold new era of cooperation with Iran. This cooperation involved technical and economic development, military cooperation and support, as well as the development of nuclear technologies. This section will focus primarily on the nuclear aspect of this cooperation, but it should be noted that the U.S. eventually expressed a vested interest in Iran becoming the “Defender of the Gulf” in order to free up American power elsewhere.⁶⁵

The Iranian nuclear program began in 1957 with the signing of the Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms (or Atoms for Peace Program).⁶⁶ The program was an initiative of the Eisenhower administration in order to strengthen U.S.-Iranian technical, academic, social, and economic ties. The program provided for installation of U.S. equipment in Iran, the supply of technical training to Iranian scientists, and provisions for a supply of fuel to power a series of nuclear reactors. The ultimate goal of these closer ties was to create a stable Iran to maintain order in the Gulf, be friendly to U.S. interests in the region, and deny the Soviets influence over the region’s oil supply and strategic locations. Iran signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1968, thus, agreeing not to pursue nuclear weapons in exchange for assistance in developing and maintaining a peaceful nuclear energy program. This program was expanded under President Gerald Ford. His administration brokered a deal that offered Iran the opportunity to acquire a reprocessing facility, thereby providing the Shah with the ability to develop a complete nuclear fuel cycle and a means for produce fuel for

⁶⁵ See ‘Nixon Doctrine.’ Richard Nixon, “President Nixon’s Speech on ‘Vietnamization’” (November 3, 1969).

⁶⁶ Kibaroglu, “Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs,” 213.

nuclear weapons.⁶⁷ In 1975, this program was expanded under the oversight of Henry Kissinger and Hushang Ansari to include the acquisition of an additional eight reactors. Such ties extended to Europe as well, with Germany and France also making billions of dollars for the sale of reactors, fuel, and the training of scientists.

The period from 1957 until 1979 represent the closest ties between Iran and the West in history, yet the Shah's domestic support waned as he focused on transforming Iran into a modern, Western country often at the expense of his people. The external impression of the Shah was that he was firmly in control of his country and secure in his power, but the internal impression was much different. The Shah used Western military and intelligence training and equipment to keep his people firmly under his thumb and secure his power. This lent credibility to Ayatollah Khomeini and increased his following, which eventually culminated in the Islamic Revolution.

After the Islamic Revolution, all vestiges of Western support for Iran's nuclear program fell away. This was due to both Western desires to distance themselves from the theocratic regime that rose to power, as well as Ayatollah Khomeini's desire to eliminate all Western influence within Iran, including nuclear technology.

The anti-American trajectory of the Iranian revolution reflects several complementary dynamics: the regime's desire to find its place between the then-competing superpowers; the reflection of two centuries of humiliation at the hands of the West, most lately and visibly the U.S.; and the utility of a foreign scapegoat to explain the nation's enduring difficulties.⁶⁸

Many of the Iranian nuclear scientists were arrested, exiled, or killed, leaving the program in shambles. It was not until the Iran-Iraq War that Ayatollah Khomeini began to rethink this decision.⁶⁹ Hoping to defeat Iraq and deter future aggression, Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani began to court China for nuclear technical and operational support. Later, Iran also approached Pakistan, Argentina, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, thus, gaining varying degrees of international support in

⁶⁷ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 267.

⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 2.

⁶⁹ Jafarzadeh, *The Iranian Threat*, 132.

restarting its nuclear program.⁷⁰ Iranian progress in this area appears to be moving along at an impressive rate. In 2002, it was revealed that Iran's nuclear program was much more advanced than had been originally disclosed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).⁷¹ This drove international concern about the extent and intent of the Iranian nuclear program. The West asserts that Iran is attempting to acquire nuclear weapons in order to use them against their neighbors or to pass them to terrorists, while Iran asserts that its nuclear program is only for peaceful, civilian use.

Whatever the real purpose, the U.S. has said:

The Iranian regime is defying the world with its nuclear ambitions, and the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons."⁷²

Meanwhile, the *Keyhan* (a conservative Iranian newspaper) urges the Iranian regime "to plan for acquiring the knowledge and ability to make nuclear weapons, which is necessary in preparation for the next phase in the future battlefield."⁷³ From their perspective, conflict with the U.S. is inevitable; therefore the regime must prepare for its defense through the most effective means available: nuclear weapons. In the end, the West must remember two important things: it was the U.S. that assisted Iran begin its march toward nuclear power in the beginning and it was the West that stood by silently while Iraq, Iran's replacement as the Guardian of the Gulf following the Iranian Revolution, employed chemical weapons against Iran (chemical weapons obtained with cooperation from the West).⁷⁴ Ultimately, according to Gregory Giles, the inaction of Western powers inspired Iran to act "in accordance with realist expectations" and adopt a "strategy of self-help" that may include nuclear weapons.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Kibaroglu, "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs," 217.

⁷¹ Jafarzadeh, *The Iranian Threat*, 127.

⁷² George W. Bush as quoted in Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 135.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷⁴ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 142.

⁷⁵ Gregory Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons," *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, Peter Lavoy, Scott Sagan, and James Wirtz, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 80.

F. IRAN'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

By reviewing the origins of the modern Iranian state, the turbulence of the twentieth century, and exploring the unique relationship between the U.S. and Iran in regard to the Iranian nuclear program, one can see the roots of conflict that have dug deep into the public perception and foreign policy of both countries. In 2000, then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said of Mossadegh's removal:

The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons; but the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs.⁷⁶

Would things have been different if the U.S. had not chosen this course of action?

Although it is impossible to give a definitive answer to this question, the evidence presented here suggests that the coup could not have occurred at the time and in the manner it did without considerable U.S. assistance. U.S. officials planned and directed the coup, and financed it with at least \$60,000.⁷⁷

As noted by Fariborz Mokhtari, "Iranians support a policy of deterrence because their perception of Iran's security is colored by historical experience."⁷⁸ There are three conclusions that need to be stressed to properly set the stage for the following chapters. First, Iran's Persian history has led to the notion among Iranians that Iran is more than a mere country: it is a civilization that deserves both respect from the international community and acknowledgement of its place as a regional power. Second, Iran's Shi'ite heritage has created a threat to its security from the Sunni regimes that surround it: nuclear power would be a hedge against aggression from both regional and international powers. Finally, the history of Western influence in Iran has contributed to the current interest in nuclear power by both the Iran's elite and its masses as a deterrent force to deter any future interference.

⁷⁶ Madeleine Albright, "Remarks by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright on American-Iranian Relations" (March 17, 2000).

⁷⁷ Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran," 278.

⁷⁸ Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back," 209.

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III. COMPETING PERSPECTIVES: U.S. INTELLIGENCE AND IRANIAN MOTIVATIONS

A. WHAT IS IRAN UP TO?

There is a shadow hanging over the United States' pronouncements regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Bugged in controversy over mistakes made in the run up to the invasion of Iraq, inflamed by Iranian rhetoric, and frustrated by allied doubt, the U.S. has worked to understand where Iran stands, and where it intends to go with its nuclear ambitions. In the midst of the political bantering back and forth about the status and purpose of the program lie fundamental questions regarding the validity of and underlying motivations behind U.S. assessments over Iran as well: is the U.S. looking for another fight? Will the U.S. let Iran acquire nuclear weapons, a situation potentially threatening U.S. regional allies such as Israel? Such threats are at the heart of Iran's current military build-up and doctrinal shift according to Steven Ward.

If [Iran] can fulfill its maturing approach to doctrine, Iran will be better positioned to threaten U.S. interests despite many military shortcomings. And, should conflict come, Iran could be much better prepared than recent American adversaries to upset seriously U.S. operations through surprise, unconventional tactics, and worldwide retaliatory responses.⁷⁹

This section examines the current situation in order to develop an objective understanding of what is known about Iran's nuclear program from a historical and contemporary perspective, while exploring the back and forth between critics and supporters of the most current National Intelligence Estimate on Iran conducted in 2007. In order to accomplish this, this thesis will evaluate support and opposition for U.S. intelligence estimates of Iran, and will try to see the issue from the Iranian perspective. Whenever trying to distinguish a state's intent by looking at its capability, there is room for misinterpretation, but by eliminating emotional and political biases in favor of a careful review of the evidence, one can obtain an objective understanding from which informed predictions can be made.

⁷⁹ Steven Ward, "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine," *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), 559-560.

B. U.S. ESTIMATES

The U.S. overstated the presence and threat of Iraqi WMD prior to its 2003 invasion, so how reliable are its current estimates of the Iranian program? To make an assessment, one should understand the process by which such estimates are made. Sarah Kreps provides the necessary overview.⁸⁰ First, intelligence estimates must be requested by senior leadership in the Executive Branch, Legislative Branch, or the Department of Defense. Once requested, they are authorized by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and the National Intelligence Council (NIC), who then establishes the framework that will define the scope of the finished document, and creates an initial draft. This draft is then sent out across the Intelligence Community (IC) for “coordination, comment, and critique.”⁸¹ The document is then reviewed by interagency working groups. These groups thoroughly review the document in order to ensure accuracy and wording, as well as to reach a multi-agency consensus of the material. Minor disagreements are tolerated, but noted in footnotes. It is then sent out for a review process similar to the academic publishing peer review process. Feedback from this review results in a document that is presented to the National Intelligence Board (NIB). The NIB is made up of senior intelligence officials from the U.S. Government and chaired by the DNI. Once finalized, the report is provided to the requestor for appropriate action. Kreps points out that “since they are based on incomplete information, NIEs tend to hedge against the uncertainty by including qualifying or probabilistic language.”⁸²

Qualifying or probabilistic language is at the heart of the current flap over intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program. The 2005 NIE asserted that Iran was “determined” to acquire nuclear weapons, while the 2007 NIE has softened that assessment to the statement “we do not know whether [Iran] currently intends to develop nuclear weapons.”⁸³ Further, the 2007 NIE also asserts with “high confidence that in fall

⁸⁰ Sarah Kreps, “Shifting Current: Changes in National Intelligence Estimates on the Iran Nuclear Threat,” *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 23, No. 5 (October, 2008), 610–611.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 610.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 611.

⁸³ National Intelligence Council, *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities* (November 2007).

2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program:” a notion completely contradictory to the 2005 assessment.⁸⁴ Supporters cite that the current assessment provides application of lessons learned from Iraq in that it allows for “red teaming” and incorporation of new intelligence that contradicts preconceived notions, while critics blast the report for its rapid reversal of all previous data and indications. Supporters cite red teaming and incorporation of new intelligence as two factors directly resulting from U.S. intelligence lessons learned following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. U.S. intelligence failures in Iraq have often been blamed on politics: that is to say that the Bush administration was looking for an excuse to attack Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction provided the required justification.⁸⁵ In such an environment, according to John McCreary and Richard Posner, preconceptions are likely to “exert a subtle, invisible, unacknowledged, indeed unconscious, but strong gravitational pull” toward predetermined conclusions.⁸⁶ The assertion of political motivations, institutional bias, or incompetence likely drove the IC to be much more cautious with the 2007 assessment on Iran.

The NIE that laid the groundwork for U.S. actions in Iraq was entitled “Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction.”⁸⁷ It was released in 2002 and was originally classified “Top Secret,” but an unclassified version was released in April 2004. This document outlined several key judgments regarding Saddam Hussein’s WMD program concluding with “high confidence” that “Iraq is continuing, and in some areas expanding, its chemical biological, nuclear and missile programs contrary to U.N. resolutions” and “[the U.S.] is not detecting portions of these weapons programs.”⁸⁸ Of course, once the invasion was complete, no WMD was found in Iraq. So what went wrong?

⁸⁴ National Intelligence Council, *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*.

⁸⁵ Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 2004), 137.

⁸⁶ McCreary and Posner, “The Latest Intelligence Crisis,” 378.

⁸⁷ National Intelligence Council, *Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction* (October 2002).

⁸⁸ National Intelligence Council, *Key Judgments [From October 2002 NIE]: Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction* (October 2002).

The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction was a panel of experts established by Executive Order 13328 in order to evaluate what exactly went wrong with the intelligence on Iraq.⁸⁹ Their findings concluded that the IC “grossly erred” in its assessments of Iraq’s extent and intent of WMD. There are six key points to highlight from the report for purposes of the current discussion. First, the panel was frustrated by its inability to get full access to how policy makers used the intelligence they received on Iraq. Second, they criticized U.S. intelligence for relying on an informant, code named “Curveball” and later identified as Rafid Ahmed Alwan, who was never interviewed directly by U.S. intelligence officers. Curveball was handled exclusively by German agents prior to the 2003 invasion.⁹⁰ Third, some equipment thought to be for nuclear weapons was in fact used for other purposes. An example of this is aluminum rods believed to be procured for enrichment activities were actually used for conventional munitions. Fourth, some of the most alarming intelligence leading up the invasion, Iraqi efforts to procure yellowcake, stemmed from “transparently forged documents.”⁹¹ These documents contained numerous examples of forgeries, misspelled words, and incorrect titles that should have been an indication of their lack of validity. Fifth, other defectors who were originally considered credible turned out to be providing inaccurate data. Finally, despite wide-spread speculation, the panel did not find concrete evidence of coercion by administration officials to manipulate the findings of intelligence officials.

Henry Kissinger, on the opposing side of the 2007 Iran NIE argument, states that the report “blurred the lines between estimates and conjecture, policy and intelligence.”⁹² While writing in *The Background*, James Phillips outlines the main criticisms of the NIE.⁹³ First, the estimate is more cautious than those of the International Atomic Energy

⁸⁹ Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (March 2005).

⁹⁰ Greg Miller and Bob Drogin, “Intelligence Analysts Whiffed on ‘Curveball’,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 24, 2007), <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0401-10.htm> (accessed May 25, 2009).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Kreps, “Shifting Current,” 619.

⁹³ James Phillips, “The Iran National Intelligence Estimate: A Comprehensive Guide to What is Wrong with the NIE,” *The Background* No. 2098 (January 2008), 1.

Agency (IAEA). John Bolton, former Under Secretary of State, says that “when the IAEA is tougher than our analysts, you can bet the farm that someone is pursuing a policy agenda.”⁹⁴ Second, the document delves into policy formulation rather than intelligence analysis. This is the case because the NIE assigns a greater importance to international pressures than military force in coercing Iran to pursue the U.S.’ desired course of action, thereby appearing to push a particular course of action for decision makers. Third, the document implies that the weaponization of a warhead is the most important aspect of a covert nuclear program. Opponents charge that bomb designs are not nearly as complex as other aspects of the overall process. Bomb designers can employ computer programs to assess the viability of the designs with such accuracy that tests of the actual device are not always necessary. With Iran’s connections to A. Q. Khan’s network of nuclear proliferation, research and development on warhead designs may not even be necessary since the designs for such components were available for sale. Fourth, the NIE does not recognize the importance of Iran’s civil uranium enrichment program.⁹⁵ Iran currently has only one working reactor: Bushehr. Nuclear fuel for this reactor is provided by Russia and there are no plans for this to change, so why would Iran need a complete fuel cycle, especially one with the capacity that they are currently pursuing? Fifth, the NIE fails to recognize the possibility of a disinformation campaign on the part of Iran. Much of what is known about Iran’s program was obtained via a laptop computer turned over to U.S. officials by a defector, information from dissident groups with contacts inside Iran, and electronic intercepts. These techniques are subject to manipulation by the targeted state as was the case of U.S. and Soviet espionage efforts during the Cold War. Also, as in the case of defectors and informants from Iraq, the information received may be subject to inaccuracies based on prejudices of the informant (e.g., to punish one’s former regime for some perceived injustice) or a desire to please foreign intelligence analysts (e.g., in the hopes of obtaining sanctuary or special

⁹⁴ Phillips, “The Iran National Intelligence Estimate: A Comprehensive Guide to What is Wrong with the NIE,” 2.

⁹⁵ “Public anxiety about Iran’s nuclear intentions is focused on the Natanz uranium enrichment plant ... [which mirrors previous] concern about Pakistan’s Kahuta enrichment plant.” Simon Henderson, “Iran’s Nuclear Program: Lessons from Pakistan,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #1562 (July 30, 2009), 1.

privileges for the information provided). Sixth, the document looks at the nuclear program in isolation from other programs, such as Iran's ballistic missile program. Since the nuclear warheads require a delivery system of some sort, analysts must look at tertiary or supporting programs to develop a complete picture of a state's intent. Finally, the NIE downplays the importance of U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in influencing Iran to slow or stop work on its nuclear program, if in fact it has slowed or stopped. Ultimately, this report has the potential to lift pressure on Iran because it proposes that they are not in fact pursuing a weapons program: an assertion flatly rejected by many U.S. allies. An anonymous British official quoted by Phillips states that the Iranians could have easily duped intelligence officers by putting out false or controlled information to confuse efforts, especially following U.S. actions in Iraq. Further, an Israeli analyst (also anonymous) pointed to U.S. failures in detecting Syria's nuclear efforts:

The Syrians were working on their nuclear project for seven years, and we discovered it only recently. The Americans didn't know about it at all. So how can we be sure about Iran?⁹⁶

Despite all of the circumstantial evidence supporting a military aspect to the Iranian nuclear program and the criticisms of the current NIE, there remains, however, no clear evidence of a specific weapons program.⁹⁷ This fact underpins most rhetoric supporting restraint against Iran right now and is completely in line with the 2007 NIE's assessment. For its part, Iran has claimed to have provided all required information and support required by the IAEA. Additionally, they have explained away all previous breaches as either oversights, mistakes, or simply as actions they took clandestinely because they could not rely on the international community to openly support them. They have accurately pointed out that the course of action they selected was the only one available to them since they were:

⁹⁶ Phillips, "The Iran National Intelligence Estimate," 5.

⁹⁷ Miller, "Proliferation Gamesmanship," 567.

Deprived of full access to international nuclear commerce and vulnerable to American disruptions of its deals, [therefore] Iran could not draw upon or rely on legitimate markets in nuclear technology.⁹⁸

Precedents of such errors and lack of support are not uncommon. South Korea was discovered to have committed breaches similar to Iran's, yet there was little if any international attention or condemnation for their actions. This reinforces Iranian assertions that it is being unfairly targeted by the U.S.: actions they have referred to as "political bullying."⁹⁹ Much of the assertions made by the U.S. against Iran in regard to their nuclear ambitions have been unquestioned. McCreary and Posner caution policy makers from overestimating the accuracy of consensus intelligence because it requires one to place a considerable amount of faith in the assumptions underlying speculation about Iranian intentions and decisions.¹⁰⁰ "There is a critical difference," they say, "between intelligence concerning a physical event or activity, on the one hand, and intelligence concerning a decision on the other."¹⁰¹

Without a clear understanding of where Iran stands, the U.S. risks repeating the Iraq WMD fiasco all over again. Miller suggests that there are four scenarios that are consistent with the current evidence against Iran, none of which should invite a U.S. invasion akin to Iraq.¹⁰² First, Iran is in fact seeking nuclear weapons: a scenario looked at more closely in the next section. Second, Iran had a nuclear weapons program in development to counter Saddam Hussein's program, but gave it up after the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Third, Iran is developing a nuclear weapons option that may be fast tracked under specific circumstances. This position is favored by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, who states that Iran's mastery of a complete nuclear fuel cycle and the option of fielding a nuclear weapon is a deterrent in and of itself.¹⁰³ Finally, Iran is only pursuing a civil nuclear power program.

⁹⁸ Miller, "Proliferation Gamesmanship," 579.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 567.

¹⁰⁰ McCreary and Posner, "The Latest Intelligence Crisis," 371.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁰² Miller, "Proliferation Gamesmanship," 595–598.

¹⁰³ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 269.

All but the first of these scenarios would fit easily with the findings of the 2007 NIE. In trying to interpret which scenario is most likely, Miller notes that it is difficult to establish where Iran is currently at due to:

An odd and erratic mix of progress and failure, cooperation and collision, transparency and obduracy, concessions offered and concessions retracted that complicate the entire process of understanding where exactly Iran is in the process of nuclear weapons development.¹⁰⁴

Despite the application of some of the lessons learned from the intelligence failure leading up to the invasion of Iraq, there still appears to be underlying problems with the current intelligence assessment on Iran. The majority of what the U.S. claims to know is based on informants, foreign governments hostile to Iran, and circumstantial evidence: similar or identical problems identified in light of the Iraq WMD mistake. While most of the evidence pointing toward a nuclear weapons program in Iran is circumstantial, there is however a lot of it. An amount so overwhelming, in fact, that it is not likely that Iran is simply pursuing nuclear technology solely for peaceful uses as it has repeatedly claimed. The key aspects that underpin this statement are Iran's program of tertiary research and development, as well as the logic of developing a nuclear deterrent. From the research and development side, one must ask why Iran would require more sophisticated ballistic missiles without the armaments necessary to maximize their usage. Conventional ballistic missiles do not have the accuracy or payload to make them worthwhile to pursue, nor would there be a need for Iran to pursue nuclear-capable missile cones without intent to field them with nuclear warheads. It is also interesting to note that just as America and its Western allies provided Iraq with weapons during the 1980s, Iran is acquiring much of its technology from Western nations, such as the U.S., Germany, and Russia. In fact, Iran was identified in 2008 by 2008 U.S. Department of Justice as the top enforcement priority for illegal export control enforcement.¹⁰⁵ As pointed out by Phillips, "it makes little military sense to invest so heavily in such missile programs

¹⁰⁴ Miller, "Proliferation Gamesmanship," 553.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. companies knowingly or unknowingly provided Iran with sensitive technology for missiles, aircraft, and improvised explosive device. Michael Jacobson, "Cracking Down on Iran's Illegal Trade," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #1570 (August 19, 2009), 1.

unless the warheads are armed with nuclear weapons.”¹⁰⁶ Such missiles provide Iran with a stand-off capability ideally suited for a strategic nuclear deterrence in line with its regional and global security concerns. The second key aspect, the logic of nuclear deterrence, will be addressed in the following two sections.

C. IRAN’S PERSPECTIVE

After reviewing the assessments of Iran’s nuclear program, it appears that Iran is likely pursuing nuclear weapons. Keith Payne notes that deterring Iran will not be as easy deterring the Soviets because:

A close examination of Iranian decision making suggests that deterring Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program is going to be extremely difficult because the external and internal value of nuclear weapons are high for the leadership.¹⁰⁷

Such a conclusion, however, does not mean it is impossible. There are several issues that underlie Iranian nuclear ambitions, as well as several parallels between the current U.S.-Iranian situation and the U.S.-Soviet Cold War relationship. It is very likely that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence against what it perceives as a hostile U.S. foreign policy, to counter Israeli nuclear dominance in the Middle East, as a countermeasure to Pakistan’s nuclear program in the event of heightened tensions, and as a means of reacquiring the previous glory of the Persian Empire, just as the Soviets pursued nuclear weapons in order to deter another invasion from Europe and a U.S. monopoly on post-World War II international power.

So far this thesis has shown the roots of the U.S.–Iranian conflict, discussed the history of the Iranian nuclear program, and looked at U.S. intelligence estimates regarding the Iranian nuclear program. The question to ask now is why would Iran want nuclear weapons even if it has no intention of immediately employing them? By

¹⁰⁶ Phillips, “The Iran National Intelligence Estimate,” 6.

¹⁰⁷ Keith Payne, “Deterring Iran: The Values at Stake and the Acceptable Risks,” *Deterring the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran*, Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, eds., 3.

evaluating Iran's rationale for wanting nuclear capabilities from a rational actor perspective, one can understand the why such capability would be sought even if never employed. From Iran's perspective, nuclear weapons would provide protection from regional and global forces that constantly exert pressure and constrain their actions.¹⁰⁸ Such pressures include Iran's encirclement by the U.S., the Israeli nuclear weapons program, the Pakistani nuclear weapons program, and the growing notion that to be a great power, a state must possess nuclear weapons. Iran has lived under sanctions and threat of attack since the theocratic regime came to power in 1979 and it is logical for them to seek a means of increasing their state security and international standing through techniques that have proven effective for other modern states. The most effective of such techniques has been the development and fielding of nuclear weapons. As observed by Fariborz Mokhtari, "from the Iranian vantage point, the case for a nuclear deterrent is compelling."¹⁰⁹

Feroz Hassan Khan points out that "insecure states that lack firm security commitments from allies and that fear for their survival are essentially 'orphans' in a nuclear-armed world."¹¹⁰ The U.S. and Iran have a long history of animosity toward one another and there is little doubt that Iran perceives the U.S. as a significant and immediate threat. U.S. forces have toppled governments on two of its borders and worked to replace them with anti-Iranian regimes. This occurred shortly after it supported Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War with arms and equipment, including chemical weapons that were used against Iran and resulted in an estimated 34,000 casualties.¹¹¹ Additionally, the U.S. has made no secret of its desire to see the theocratic regime toppled and replaced with a more pro-Western one. U.S. threats along these lines are no small matter in the post 9/11 world. The International Crisis Group quotes an unnamed Iranian analyst who summed it up best:

¹⁰⁸ Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," 584–586.

¹⁰⁹ Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back," 210.

¹¹⁰ Feroz Hassan Khan, "Nuclear Proliferation Motivation," *The Nonproliferation Review* Vol. 13, No. 3 (November 2006), 502.

¹¹¹ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 142.

Of all of the justifications the [Iranian] regime could invoke to pursue its nuclear program, those provided by the Americans were the most effective by far. Aside from Iran, two countries belonged to Bush's "axis of evil": Iraq and North Korea. The former did not possess a nuclear weapon; the latter did. Iraq was invaded, its regime overthrown, its territory occupied. Meanwhile, the U.S. is seeking to negotiate with North Korea. What conclusion do you think the Iranian regime would have drawn from this?¹¹²

Also, the potential threat posed by nuclear-armed neighbors not friendly to Iran presents a concern to the ruling clerics. Armed with nuclear weapons, Israel is the dominant military power in the Middle East. As the dominant power, Israel is often presented as an arrogant, bullying offspring of the U.S. Deep animosity remains in the region due to Israeli treatment of Palestinians, yet there is little that any state in the region can do to compel Israel to cease what they see as aggressive and hostile acts toward their Muslim neighbors. There is also concern that the Pakistani nuclear weapons program could someday become a threat to Iran. Pakistan is not a stable state politically: the Pakistani military has played a dominant role in the political process through coups with military officers seizing power and ruling roughly 23 out of its 62 years of existence. Under the current circumstances, there is an increasing possibility that Wahhabi fundamentalist groups will come to power in this nuclear armed state through insurgency or a change in political climate. If this were to happen, Iran likely perceives that there would be a direct nuclear threat to Shi'a Islam from a fundamentalist Sunni regime: a situation that Iran, the champions of Shi'a Islam, would feel compelled to counter with a Shi'a nuclear bomb capability. A nuclear-armed Iran would not provide Iran with supremacy in the region; rather it would provide Iran a nuclear deterrent that would counterbalance Israel and Pakistan, thus, providing for a level of security Iran could not otherwise achieve.¹¹³ Add to this the growing notion that to be a great power, a state must possess nuclear weapons, and one sees the motivation for Iran to pursue

¹¹² International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 5.

¹¹³ Ray Takeyh, "Iranian Options: Pragmatic Mullahs and America's Interests," *The National Interest* (Fall 2003), 54.

nuclear weapons. As discussed in Chapter II, Iran has a long history of both Persian nationalism and Shi'a Islamic revolutionary spirit: the two factors that have combined to create their current national identity.

D. IRANIAN RATIONALITY

One might question the rationality of any theocratic regime, especially one highlighted for its support of international terrorism and status as a member of the “Axis of Evil.” While a full debate of this issue is too long to address in this forum and will draw very strong opinions from both sides of the argument, it is sufficient to note that there are numerous examples of Iranian pragmatism in domestic and foreign policy that trump religious ideology. As briefly touched on in Chapter II, Iran has a worldview that differs from the West. Worldviews create the foundation upon which rationality is based and decisions are made. In short, rationality is relative because the costs/benefits of a given action are established based on one's worldview. Since Iranian worldviews differ from those of Western worldviews, their actions may appear less rational on the surface, but when analyzed from an Iranian perspective, they become clear.¹¹⁴

The presence of such examples supports the notion that while Iran is ideologically committed to Shi'ite Islam and Islamic revolutionary rhetoric, they are also rational actors and will look at policy in terms of cost/benefit analysis. Such provocative statements from Iran serve to inflame the Arab street in order to weaken Sunni regimes hostile to Iran, while rallying the Muslim masses by presenting Iran as the champion of Islam against Zionism and Western interference. Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel's former Foreign Minister, says:

In my view [rallying the Arab street] remains, even with this nuclear thing, the main purpose of Ahmadinejad's incendiary rhetoric. If the discourse in the Middle East is n Arab discourse, Iran is isolated. If it is an Islamic discourse, then Iran is in a leading position. And always with the view of

¹¹⁴ Monroe and Kreidie, “The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists,” 19–43.

protecting Iran and the Iranian revolution, which is why they tried all the time to oppose the peace process.¹¹⁵

This is critical when attempting to predict the course of action they are likely to pursue if they acquire nuclear weapons, as well as in developing deterrence strategies for dealing with a nuclear armed Iran.

Writing in *The Middle East Journal*, Fariborz Mokhtari notes that:

Without allies or surrounding protective oceans, Iran's security must therefore be based on deterrence ... Iran's deterrence must be self-generate and self-reliant. A conventional force based on domestic resources, technology and industrial capacity, could not overcome the above security challenges. A credible nuclear deterrence with a reliable missile technology could, and is relatively inexpensive and probably within reach.¹¹⁶

The area surrounding Iran is an inherently unstable region. With troubled states such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the uni-polar status of the U.S., Iran is in a unique position to obtain a greater place not only on the regional stage, but on the world stage as well. Their foreign policy decisions are likely to follow a course of action designed to increase their influence and status, rather than to threaten greater instability and increased division between themselves and the regional and international community. Henry Kissinger reminds us that "nations have pursued self-interest more frequently than high-minded principle."¹¹⁷ While Iran is a theocratic state with a deeply ingrained Shi'ite perspective, it is also a modern nation-state that must calculate its actions carefully or fade into oblivion. Iran is therefore more likely motivated by such issues as national pride and prestige, pursuit of great power status, counteracting perceived threats to national security, and internal desires by political and social elites than it is by religious zeal or mischievous intentions.¹¹⁸

Many Israelis even acknowledge the rationality of Iranian foreign policy decisions despite the rhetoric often portrayed to international audiences. Israeli television journalist

¹¹⁵ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 265.

¹¹⁶ Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back," 211.

¹¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 19.

¹¹⁸ Kibaroglu, "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs," 223.

Ehud Yaari notes “people [in Israel] respect the Iranians and the Iranian regime. They take them as very serious, calculating players.”¹¹⁹ Additionally, Ephraim Halevi, former Director of Mossad and head of the Israeli National Security Council, asserts that “I don’t think they are irrational, I think they are very rational ... to label them as irrational is escaping from reality and it gives you kind of an escape clause.”¹²⁰ The underlying concern in the Israel-Iran rivalry is captured by Trita Parsi when he says:

Israel and Iran’s fear that the creation of a new order in the region would benefit the other is acute precisely because the Middle East lacks a geopolitical basis for its frail order.¹²¹

Parsi even goes so far as to cite “several Israeli decision-makers” who state that “the [Israeli] Labor Party exaggerated the Iranian threat for political reasons.”¹²²

In his article “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” R. K. Ramazani points out that:

The tensions between religious ideology and pragmatism has persisted throughout Iranian history...[yet] the dynamic processes of cultural maturation seem to be shifting the balance of influence increasingly away from religious ideology toward pragmatic calculation of the national interest in making and implementation of foreign policy decisions.¹²³

One such example of the pragmatism of the Iranian government that illustrates their rationality in foreign affairs is the purchase of arms from the U.S. and Israel. The transaction took place during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988 and was conducted via intermediaries in order to bolster Iranian forces while providing assistance to the U.S. and Israel in securing the release of hostages in Lebanon.¹²⁴ This scenario is similar to the U.S. covert program to provide other military equipment to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages seized following the Iranian Revolution. This transaction

¹¹⁹ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 270.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 262.

¹²² Ibid., 266.

¹²³ R. K. Ramazani, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn 2004), 549.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 556.

came to be known as the Iran-Contra Affair. One must ask why, if religious ideology is at the heart of Iranian foreign policy, then why they would enter agreements with “The Great Satan?” Ramazani provides the answer: “when Iran’s ideological and strategic interests collide, as they did in the 1980s, strategic considerations consistently prevailed.”¹²⁵ Another example of calculation beyond theology is Iranian President Seyed Mohammad Khatami’s first major political address being directed not toward Iranians, but rather toward Americans. In this address, he attempted to build a bridge between the U.S. and Iran by highlighting the similarities between the American and Iranian revolutions.¹²⁶ Khatami’s administration worked to overcome impressions of Iranian radical fundamentalism in foreign policy going so far as to condemn the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and assisting the U.S. with their efforts to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Islamists evinced visceral hatred for Shi’ites, fueling Iranian fear and anger. Ousting them from power, increasing Iranian influence on its neighbour and returning the many Afghan refugees living in Khorasan province were the Islamic Republic’s barely concealed wishes. As a result, Iran cooperated with U.S. military forces, providing substantial assistance to Operation Enduring Freedom.¹²⁷

Unfortunately, these overtures, clear examples of rational state behavior, have been mainly forgotten as Iran was proclaimed a member of the “Axis of Evil” by President George W. Bush. Interestingly, it was the Bush administration that received an overture from Iran (via Swiss intermediaries) in order to open a dialog regarding its nuclear program and reach a consensus: an overture that was flatly rejected.¹²⁸

From Iran’s perspective, it was the ultimate betrayal. Tehran had worked with America to get rid of a dangerous adversary. Then, without warning, Washington turned around, branded it a member of the “axis of evil.” In the meantime, the U.S. closed ranks with a country, Pakistan, that did precisely what Washington accused Iran of wishing to do: acquiring a

¹²⁵ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 263.

¹²⁶ Ramazani, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” 557.

¹²⁷ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 3.

¹²⁸ Miller, “Proliferation Gamesmanship,” 591.

nuclear bomb, harbour terrorists and provide support to militants in a neighboring country, Afghanistan.¹²⁹

Based on all of this, it appears that Iran is just as rational an actor as the U.S. Since Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons capabilities can be explained in terms of countering real or perceived threats to the state, increasing state prominence in the international community, and attainment of hegemonic power in the Middle East, then they are clearly rational actors and historical and theoretical models can be applied to assess their threat to the U.S., Iranian nuclear weapons may be delivered in one of two ways: direct use or indirect use.

E. THE CASE FOR THE NUCLEAR OPTION

There is a shadow hanging over U.S. pronouncements regarding the Iranian nuclear program. This shadow stems from previous failures to correctly assess the extent and intent of weapons of mass destruction on the part of Iraq. This shadow has led to a much more cautious interpretation of Iranian nuclear capabilities, potentially costing the U.S. time in working out a solution to the current situation and risking incongruence with allies. While it appears clear that the U.S. is not looking for another fight, the Iranians likely are looking to shift the advantage in their favor if a fight does come, especially if the fight is from the U.S., Israel, or Pakistan. A nuclear armed Iran is not likely to result in an immediate war, but it will likely result in a shift in the balance of power in the Middle East: a shift the Iranians will capitalize on in order to assert themselves more forcefully onto the regional and world stage in order to regain their perceived rightful place in the world order. Bueno de Mesquita, a pioneer in the use of computer models and game theory to analyze political science, has concluded that Iran will not even build a nuclear bomb at all: he contends that “the less America tries to influence Iran, the more quickly Iran will abandon nuclear weapons.”¹³⁰

This section reviewed the current U.S.-Iranian situation with detachment in order to develop an objective understanding of what is known about Iran’s nuclear program

¹²⁹ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 4.

¹³⁰ Clive Thompson, “Can Game Theory Predict When Iran Will Get the Bomb?” *New York Times* (August 16, 2009).

from a historical and contemporary perspective, while exploring the back and forth between critics and supporters of the most current National Intelligence Estimate on Iran conducted in 2007, and concluded that the 2007 estimate likely underestimates Iran's capability and intent regarding nuclear weapons. In evaluating support and opposition for U.S. intelligence estimates of Iran, and seeing the issue from the Iranian perspective, this chapter has shown that Iran is likely on its way to obtaining nuclear weapons out of "Persian pride, a desire for technical prestige, and a sense of regional leadership."¹³¹ This chapter has also laid a foundation to support an evaluation of Iranian policy in terms of a balance of pragmatism and idealism that supports the notion that they are in fact rational actors on the world stage.

¹³¹ Mark Fitzpatrick, "Lessons Learned from Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons," *The Nonproliferation Review* Vol. 13, No. 3 (November 2006), 535.

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IV. DIRECT USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: WILL THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM RESULT IN NUCLEAR WAR?

A. INTRODUCTION TO DIRECT EMPLOYMENT

There is a tremendous debate within the international community regarding Iran's perceived efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and the possible ramifications of such a move. While Iran has a history of provocative action and confrontation with the West, the development of nuclear power and the acquisition of nuclear weapons can be explained in terms of normal state behavior based on the assumption that Iran is both a rational actor and that a new multi-polar world order is emerging in which states such as China and India are seeking a greater share of international power. Iranian nuclear technology ambitions are likely motivated by their expectation that domestic oil reserves will be depleted over the next 90 years, plus some argue that it is cheaper and more environmentally friendly to produce electricity using nuclear sources instead of fossil fuels, not to mention the fact that there is a certain degree of prestige associated with nuclear power.¹³² By looking at current intelligence estimates, Iranian intentions and motivations, as well as the rationality of Iran, one can develop a realistic assessment of their nuclear technology ambitions.

As stated in Chapter III, the results of such an assessment appear to support the conclusion that Iran is in fact pursuing some sort of nuclear weapons capability. Such a conclusion does not mean that Iran has a specific intent to employ such weapons immediately against a global or regional rival, nor does it necessarily mean that a transfer to terrorists is imminent. As noted in Chapter I, despite multiple states developing nuclear weapons, only the U.S. ever developed nuclear them with a specific target in mind. Though nuclear weapons have been developed in order to counter conventional or nuclear superiority on the part of a state's rivals, for example the U.S.S.R. developed nuclear weapons to counter U.S. weapons and Pakistan developed theirs to counter

¹³² Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," 584.

India's. If Iran does in fact have a target in mind for nuclear weapons (either immediately or in the event of future conflict), then they must be delivered through one of two ways: direct use or indirect use.

The first employment scenario is of concern from a homeland defense perspective: direct use of a nuclear weapon against the continental United States; American military forces in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia; or against U.S. allies in the region or around the globe. In evaluating the possibility of such an action, the historical model of the U.S.-Soviet relationship during the Cold War provides a calming, though sobering insight. During the Cold War, both the Americans and the Soviets possessed nuclear weapons, as the U.S. and Iran likely will by the middle of the next decade.¹³³ Also, despite periods of allied cooperation (the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were allies during World War II, just as the U.S. and Iran were allies following World War II), an adversarial relationship developed (as the U.S. and Iran have experienced since 1979). Despite their animosity toward one another, numerous opportunities for conflict, and extreme divergence of ideology, there was never a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Kenneth Waltz explains that this was the case due to the cost of nuclear weapons outweighing any benefit the state would gain by employing them.¹³⁴ A nuclear strike against a nuclear-armed opponent invites a nuclear retaliatory strike, thus, the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD) that kept an uneasy peace during the Cold War. Scott Sagan takes a divergent position however. In his assessment, the spread of nuclear weapons has a destabilizing effect on the world because it increases the probability of accidents and miscalculations that could touch off war.

Direct use of nuclear weapons will be addressed in this section, while indirect use will be addressed in the next chapter. Having established in Chapter III that Iran is a rational actor, one must review the cost/benefit relationship in using nuclear weapons. If a given state possesses nuclear weapons and employs them against another state that also possesses nuclear weapons, then there is a reasonable expectation that they will face a

¹³³ National Intelligence Council, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities" (November 2007).

¹³⁴ Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 6–8.

retaliatory strike from the targeted state. Is Iran willing to risk a retaliatory attack from a nuclear armed state? If so, for what reason would they do so and can they be deterred? Does Iran believe the U.S. would employ nuclear weapons in retaliation for Iranian nuclear strikes against U.S. allies? Jeffrey Lewis provides four points necessary for deterring Iran from nuclear attacks.¹³⁵ The U.S. should ensure that Iran knows it will remain at a disadvantage both in conventional and nuclear arms, use detailed deterrent language to make U.S. response doctrines clear, reaffirm security commitments to allies potentially targeted by Iran, and define the terms of an acceptable relationship between the two countries.

B. EMPLOYING THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Under what conditions would Iran resort to direct employment of nuclear weapons? Such a question sets up a situation similar to the Cold War in which the U.S. and U.S.S.R. both possessed nuclear weapons and had diametrically opposed political, ideological, and economic systems. Despite their mutual hostility and covert efforts to undermine and weaken the other, neither resorted to the employment of nuclear weapons. The reason for this is simply that the cost of using nuclear weapons greatly outweighs the benefits gained if the opposing state can counter-strike with nuclear weapons. Since both maintained robust nuclear capabilities, neither side was able to achieve a significant enough advantage to make direct use acceptable. Would such a dynamic balance be attainable with Iran? Earlier chapters discussed Iranian motivations for nuclear weapons development and established that they were likely pursuing nuclear weapons technology out of fear of military and/or political pressures, as well as for the sake of national pride, technical prestige, and the goal of regional leadership.¹³⁶ Such motivations are similar to Soviet motivations to counter perceived American atomic power following the Second World War. Soviet nuclear weapons research and development was meant to match or outpace U.S. efforts in order to prevent the U.S. from gaining a significant advantage in the emerging post-World War II order.

¹³⁵ Lewis, "Assumptions Underlying the Debate on Deterring Emerging Nuclear States," 20–23.

¹³⁶ Fitzpatrick, "Lessons Learned from Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons," 535.

Stephen Younger points out that:

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet government saw itself surrounded by an American-led alliance dedicated to its containment – or even destruction.¹³⁷

Despite wartime alliances with Washington, the Soviets viewed the development of the American atomic bomb as a clear and present threat to the survival of their political, economic, and social way of life. This threat created a situation in which national survival rested on their ability to counter U.S. efforts to develop more numerous and powerful atomic weapons. As noted in Chapter III, Iran sees itself encircled by the U.S. and its allies today. Iranian political, economic, and social systems are currently under pressure through both sanctions and rhetoric by Western powers, especially the U.S. and Israel, thus, lending support to the notion that their development of nuclear technologies may simply be the result a desire to ease pressure on their country. Further, Joseph Cirincione notes that:

[Joseph] Stalin saw the [atomic] bomb as more than a weapon. It was also a symbol of industrial might, scientific accomplishment, and national prestige. Stalin told his scientists, “Hiroshima has shaken the whole world. The balance has been broken. Build the bomb – it will remove the great danger from us.”¹³⁸

Such comments could easily come from Tehran today. Iranian desires to assert themselves as the preeminent power in the Middle East and escape Western containment require bold action on the world stage. The development of nuclear technologies serves this purpose on numerous fronts as it serves as both a warning and an inspiration to other Muslim countries (many targets of bold U.S. foreign policy action during the Global War on Terror) and creates an uncertainty in Western attempts to determine Iranian military strengths when contemplating contingency plans. Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt note that:

¹³⁷ Stephen Younger, *The Bomb: A New History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 33.

¹³⁸ Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare: The History & Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 17.

Whereas North Korea may have developed nuclear weapons out of desperation, Iran is pursuing them as much out of aspiration – to be accepted as a great power with modern technology.¹³⁹

So is there a situation in which Iran might use nuclear weapons directly against the U.S.? By exploring the similarities between Soviet and Iranian nuclear development and the balance of power that developed between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. during the Cold War, it would appear that the Iranians are not likely attempting to match American conventional or nuclear firepower for a direct confrontation, rather they are attempting to gain prestige and a greater degree of freedom of movement in the political realm. A dominant fear among Iranian political leadership is U.S. and Israeli threats of regime change. It therefore seems likely that the most probable scenario in which Iran might employ nuclear weapons is either in retaliation for a first strike by another party (as is likely the case with all nuclear powers) or to counter overt, aggressive, and dynamic attempts at regime change. The importance of regime change and options for incorporating it into a U.S.-Iranian deterrence model is addressed in the next section.

Is there even a scenario in which Iran would use nuclear weapons against a regional rival such as Israel? Israel has long been one of the loudest voices speaking to against Iranian nuclear efforts. While not committed to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty themselves, Israel frequently denounces Iran for its efforts to develop nuclear technology while it has already invested in a significant stockpile itself.¹⁴⁰ Trita Parsi notes that:

Israel's fear of a nuclear Iran is understandable, even though Israel does not believe that Iran would necessarily use the doomsday weapon against it. That would surely lead to Iran's own destruction: Iranian civilian and military leaders are well aware of Israel's arsenal of over two hundred nuclear warheads and its second-strike capability through its three nuclear-equipped Dolphin submarines. And contrary to the depiction of the Iranians as "mad mullahs," most strategic thinkers in Israel recognize that the Iranian government is extremist and radical—but rational.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, eds., *Deterring the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 267.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

Israeli doctrine previously focused on eradication of its regional rival, striking the Soviet Union in the event of a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., as well as a policy known as the “Samson Option” in which retreating Israeli forces would detonate nuclear weapons on their own soil to prevent being overrun by invaders.¹⁴² Ultimately, Israel’s concerns are based on a strategic rivalry more than they are on irrational actions on the part of Iran. “The real danger to Israel of a nuclear-capable Iran is twofold:” first, a nuclear Iran would inhibit Israel’s ability to control the Middle East peace process, and second, a nuclear Iran would compel the U.S. to recognize Iran as a regional power on par with Israel.¹⁴³

C. DETERRING THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Models of deterrence exist to contain direct and indirect usage of nuclear weapons, but if Iranian motivations and degree of rationality differ from those of historical actors, then previous understanding about the rules of nuclear brinksmanship may not apply. This raises the final problem addressed in this chapter: can Iran be deterred from using nuclear weapons? If Iran is a rational actor legitimately pursuing a nuclear weapons program, then Cold War models help us assess the possibility of deterrence as a strategy toward Iran. A theoretical model based on what has been observed so far with Pakistan will be used to evaluate the same thing within the realm of state sponsorship of nuclear terrorism in the next chapter.

Thus far, it appears that Iran is in fact a rational actor and is pursuing nuclear weapons not for an imminent war, but rather for relief from military and political pressures, as well as national pride, prestige, and assertion of regional leadership. This is similar enough to the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Cold War model to apply the basic tenants of deterrence as observed for roughly 50 years, yet there are key differences that have to be recognized and addressed in order to ensure there are no miscalculations between a nuclear-armed Iran and the U.S. Keith Payne provides a definition to use in the present discussion: “deterrence and coercion consist of using threats as leverage to change the

¹⁴² Seymour Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991), 137.

¹⁴³ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 272.

behavior of a target audience.”¹⁴⁴ In order to establish an effective policy of deterrence with Iran, Jeffrey Lewis suggests four essential steps the U.S. should undertake.¹⁴⁵ First, the U.S. should repeatedly stress the fact that a modest acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran would not off-set the significant strategic advantage the U.S. currently possesses. Second, it is important that the U.S. make clear, unambiguous threats regarding the employment or transfer of nuclear weapons by Iran. This is an area in which the U.S. may have a long way to go in order to gain credibility. Keith Payne notes that:

A look at apparent Iranian violations of Washington’s expressed red lines and the lack of significant, apparent consequences for transgressing those lines illustrates that deterrence is not just about having overwhelming military capabilities, but includes laying out red lines that the opponent believes will carry intolerable consequences if crossed.¹⁴⁶

Since the U.S. has failed to carry out appreciable action following Iranian transgressions in the past, then why should Iran expect action if it crosses red lines in the future? Third, the reaffirmation of defense commitments to regional allies must be stressed in order to negate fear of Iranian nuclear weapons possession and curb efforts to counter Iranian efforts that could lead to a Middle East arms race. Finally, the U.S. should engage Iran in order to establish the parameters under which a nuclear-armed Iran may live in peace with the U.S. Such a move must come before Iran acquires a complete nuclear weapons capability in order to preempt any miscalculations regarding what Iran stands to gain in terms of its relationship with the U.S.

As stated in both Chapter III and previously in this chapter, Iran has a significant fear of U.S. efforts directed toward regime change. “The threat of regime change for the clerical rulers is thus existential, compelling them to seek the nuclear option regardless of Iran’s national interest.”¹⁴⁷ The U.S. has worked to use this fear to its advantage over the past several years by threatening Iran covertly and overtly, yet has produced relatively little in the way of diplomatic progress. The development of nuclear weapons however

¹⁴⁴ Payne, “Deterring Iran,” 2.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, “Assumptions Underlying the Debate on Deterring Emerging Nuclear States,” 22–23.

¹⁴⁶ Payne, “Deterring Iran,” 3.

¹⁴⁷ Mokhtari, “No One Will Scratch My Back,” 227.

offers a new opportunity to incorporate a dialog about U.S. intentions for Iranian regime change into the diplomatic process between the two countries. Karim Sadjadpour highlights the importance of regime survival to the Iranian government: “the continued survival of the Islamic Republic is the paramount goal that unites the regime’s political elite.”¹⁴⁸ The removal of the threat of regime change by the U.S. would potentially serve two purposes. First, it would make the Iranian regime more secure, therefore less likely to pursue reckless actions to counter perceived U.S. threats. Second, survival of the regime, while not necessarily a popular course of action among Western powers, would ensure a stable political structure in Iran that would provide better control over nuclear technologies. Karim Sadjadpour also notes that this intense desire for regime survival makes Iran “extremely unlikely to use a nuclear weapon for offensive purposes.”¹⁴⁹ Joseph Cirincione highlights the fact that the U.S. has expressed to North Korea that it has “no hostile intentions toward [that] state” and that “an end to that country’s [nuclear] program would lead to the restoration of diplomatic relations.”¹⁵⁰ It is not unreasonable to pursue a similar line of diplomacy with Iran.

The U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons represents a counterbalance to Iranian first-strike options, as does the Israeli nuclear arsenal: therefore there is a double inhibiting factor present to restrain Iranian nuclear aggression. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. nuclear stockpile provided a credible deterrent to Soviet threats. The same is likely to serve in the case of Iran. As long as the U.S. makes its policies of reprisal for attack and defense of allies perfectly clear, and so long as it maintains a healthy, robust, and active nuclear force, the likelihood of a direct Iranian nuclear attack are exceedingly low. Stephen Younger sums up the importance of continued U.S. nuclear readiness best when he states:

¹⁴⁸ Karim Sadjadpour, “Oil or the Atom? The Economic Underpinnings of Iranian Power,” *Deterring the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran*, Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, eds., 28.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Cirincione, *Bomb Scare*, 151.

Nuclear weapons are no longer needed to deter a massive Soviet attack on the United States or an invasion of Western Europe. However, just as they did during the Cold War, they maintain a strategic balance, assuring each side that it cannot hope to prevail over the other. This balance has spread beyond the dyad of the United States and Russia—other nations recognize America’s conventional military supremacy and have decided to weather international condemnation to build the only type of weapon that could defeat us on the battlefield.¹⁵¹

Since, however, the Iranians are decades away from developing a nuclear capability equal to the U.S. and there is a significant threat of reprisal, there is no threat to the U.S. from an Iranian nuclear first strike. Iranian nuclear weapons will likely shift the balance of power in the Middle East somewhat away from Israel, thus, an explanation for their intense desire to prevent Iran from acquiring such a capability. Iranian nuclear weapons will put Middle Eastern states other than Israel in a position that will make them uncomfortable. Two such countries are Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Israel will likely increase both the flexibility and survivability of its nuclear force, while Saudi Arabia and Egypt may begin nuclear programs of their own to off-set potential Iranian leadership in the Muslim world.

In summary, the rational-actor model is a theoretical paradigm used for analyzing organizational behavior that looks at behavioral choice in terms of a cost/benefit analysis of the expected outcome.¹⁵² Under this model, a government is said to be rational if it pursues policies that maximize reward while minimizing cost. Graham Allison asserts that to be rational, states must: (1) be unitary actors; (2) calculate the risks and benefits of actions prior to action, then choose the most beneficial course of action; (3) recognize the reality of an anarchical international system; and (4) pursue security through power.¹⁵³ All of these are consistent with Iran’s nuclear related activities. The Iranians have political and ideological divisions within their country just as the U.S. does. Despite internal debates between politicians, scientists, and military personnel, one consistent course of action can be seen as the country transitions from one Supreme Leader to

¹⁵¹ Younger, *The Bomb*, 205.

¹⁵² Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 172.

¹⁵³ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 27–28.

another and one President to another. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini reversed Iran's policy on not pursuing WMD in response to Iraq use of chemical weapons in during the Iran-Iraq war: Ayatollah Khamenei has not countermanded this policy once coming to office. Iranian policy makers have consistently evaluated actions in terms of a cost/benefit analysis. Economic, strategic, and technical factors all have played a part in Iran's decisions to support various groups and governments. For example, Iran's support of Hezbollah can be explained in terms of bolstering support for Iran from the Arab street. The Islamic Republic clearly recognizes the inability of other states to provide for its security in the Middle East. Iranian foreign policy decisions consistently reflect the dynamic, often changing security situation in the Middle East. For example, Iran's support of U.S. efforts to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan: a radical Sunni regime that posed a direct threat to Shi'a Iran. Finally, Iranian efforts to secure international diplomatic, economic, and military power are possible through the development of a limited nuclear arsenal.

D. DIRECT EMPLOYMENT CONCLUSIONS

International concern regarding Iran's perceived efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and the possible ramifications of such a move are justified. Such efforts have the potential to destabilize the balance of power in the Middle East and allow Iran to emerge from the economic and political leper status imposed upon it by 30 years of Western sanctions and harsh rhetoric. Iran has a history of provocative action and confrontation with the West, it has provided direct and indirect challenges to Western desires in the region, and it has also been an active supporter of terrorist organization. The development of nuclear technology and the acquisition of nuclear weapons can however be explained in terms of normal state behavior based on the assumption that Iran is both a rational actor and that a new multi-polar world order is emerging, rather than as another Iranian provocation. Iranian nuclear power ambitions are likely motivated by its expectation that domestic oil reserves will be depleted over the next 90 years, plus some argue that it is cheaper and more environmentally friendly to produce electricity using

nuclear sources instead of fossil fuels, not to mention the fact that there is a certain degree of prestige associated with nuclear power.¹⁵⁴

It is likely that Iran is in fact pursuing some sort of nuclear weapons capability. Such a conclusion does not mean that Iran has a specific intent to employ such weapons immediately against a global or regional rival, nor does it necessarily mean that a transfer to terrorists is imminent. Direct use of a nuclear weapon against the continental United States; against American military forces in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia; or against U.S. allies in the region or around the globe is not a likely course of action for Iran, however, since there is a strong likelihood that they would face a debilitating counter-strike. In evaluating the possibility of Iranian direct use of nuclear weapons, a review of the historical model of the U.S.-Soviet relationship during the Cold War provided a compelling case why Iran can likely be deterred from employing such weapons in a direct manner. The Soviet-American relationship during the Cold War is very similar to the U.S.-Iranian relationship today, but despite Soviet-American animosity toward one another, numerous opportunities for conflict, and extreme divergence of ideology, there was never a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union: the same will likely be the case between the U.S. and Iran. For Iran, the purpose of nuclear weapons is deterrence against coercion by rival states rather than an offensive military tool.

¹⁵⁴ Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," 584.

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V. INDIRECT USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: WILL THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM RESULT IN NUCLEAR-ARMED TERRORISTS?

A. INTRODUCTION TO INDIRECT USE

The second possible employment scenario available to Iran is of concern from a homeland security perspective and will be the focus of this chapter: the possibility of indirect use (the passing of nuclear weapons to a surrogate agent, most likely a terrorist organization) against the U.S. itself or U.S. interests in the Middle East. To evaluate this possibility, this thesis will refer to a theoretical model provided by Pakistan: the only Islamic state to develop nuclear weapons. While there have been periods of instability and clashes of political, social, and economic ideologies within Pakistan, nuclear weapons have never been passed to terrorist organizations for the sake of economic profit, political advantage, or ideological support. Pakistan represents a theoretical model rather than a historical model due to the relatively short time that they have possessed nuclear weapons. The future of Pakistan's form of government and degree of stability, level of cooperation with the U.S. in overseas contingency operations (formerly known as the Global War on Terrorism), and control over its nuclear know-how remain unclear, therefore it can only be said to represent a theoretical case as of now.

In order to fully explore the possibility of Iranian nuclear weapons being passed to a terrorist organization, this section will explore state sponsorship of terrorism in general, Iranian sponsorship of terrorism in particular, as well as different aspects of state sponsorship of nuclear terrorism, and will finally evaluate Iran's likely course of action using the theoretical model provided by Pakistan in light of their status as the only Islamic nuclear power and their relationship to terrorism.

B. STATE SPONSORSHIP OF TERRORISM

Despite its prevalence in contemporary society, terrorism is a phenomenon that defies clear, concise definitions and understanding. For the purpose of this section, terrorism is defined as:

The use or threatened use of physical violence directed against victims selected for their symbolic or representative value as a means of instilling anxiety in, transmitting one or more messages to, and thereby manipulating the perceptions and behavior of a wider target audience.¹⁵⁵

Under this definition, states, as well as nonstate actors, are recognized as being capable of carrying out, directing, or providing material support for terrorist attacks. Such a characterization is certainly controversial since no state will acknowledge support of terrorist, rather they will assure the international community that they are simply supporting “oppressed groups” or “freedom fighters.” While attribution of states as perpetrators of terrorism is often problematic, it must be recognized that state security forces are better organized, funded, equipped, and trained to carry out acts that constitute terrorism than nonstate actors, plus states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

States have the capacity to carry out terrorism either directly or indirectly. Direct state terrorism occurs when state security forces directly carry out attacks against victims selected by the state itself normally for political reasons. Hannah Arendt highlights such state terrorism in both Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.¹⁵⁶ Indirect state terrorism is more subtle and can take one (or more) of seven different forms.¹⁵⁷ First, state directed terrorism occurs when state security forces direct, guide, or control their intermediaries toward a specific act or series of acts. Second, true state sponsored terrorism refers to a situation in which state security forces provide hands-on operational assistance to intermediaries. While this general term is typically used by the U.S. to identify any state that provides any level of support to terrorists, its academic application is much more precise. Third, state supported terrorism occurs when state security forces provide logistical support (finance, weapons, safe houses, etc.) to their intermediaries. Fourth, state manipulated terrorism involves covert manipulation of intermediaries by state security forces in order to facilitate acts of terrorism without that group’s full culpability. Such operations are sometimes referred to as “False Flags.” Fifth, state encouraged terrorism occurs when state security forces

¹⁵⁵ Bale, *NS3801: Introduction to Terrorism*.

¹⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976).

¹⁵⁷ Bale, *NS3801: Introduction to Terrorism*.

incite intermediaries to carryout acts against mutual enemies for the benefit of the incumbent regime. Sixth, state exploited terrorism is when the state knowingly attributes terrorist acts to false perpetrators (usually their enemies) to protect their intermediaries or weaken enemies of the state. Finally, state sanctioned terrorism results when state security forces ignore or fail to act against their intermediaries for attacks against enemies of the state.

Some advantages of state sponsorship of terrorism are highlighted by Bruce Hoffman in *Countering the New Terrorism*.¹⁵⁸ States may choose to employ intermediaries to act as “surrogate warriors” in order to impact the domestic environment without the direct involvement of state security forces, thereby enjoying a degree of deniability in what occurs.¹⁵⁹ In external issues, states may employ terrorists in order to attempt to avoid “identification, retaliation, and sanctions.”¹⁶⁰ Under such circumstances, states may engage in asymmetric warfare against a superior force or equally armed rival while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability. It is important to note however that a relationship between a state and a terrorist organization does not necessarily constitute sponsorship. The degree of control states possess over their intermediaries and the reliability of those intermediaries are factors states must keep in mind as well because they represent two disadvantages of state sponsorship. This is especially true when there is a chance that the state’s involvement will be detected or when the intermediaries may grow dissatisfied or ambitious and turn on their benefactors.

Iran has a long and well-documented history of terrorism sponsorship. Iranian sponsorship of terrorism is grounded in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The Iranian constitution goes so far as to proclaim that:

¹⁵⁸ Hoffman, *Countering the New Terrorism*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

While scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the *mustad'afun* (downtrodden) against the *mustakbirun* (arrogant and powerful) in every corner of the globe.¹⁶¹

The most well known “arrogant and powerful” for Iran to support the “downtrodden” against are the U.S. and Israel. Iran’s support of Hezbollah (Party of God) in Lebanon since the Israeli invasion of 1982 has been an especially contentious issue. Hezbollah is a radical Islamic, specifically Shi’ite, organization that provides social services to local residents, is involved in the government of Lebanon, and takes its ideological inspiration from Ayatollah Khomeini, architect of the Iranian Revolution.¹⁶² It was originally founded by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a means of spreading the ideology of the Iranian Revolution beyond the borders of Iran. This organization is responsible for numerous kidnappings and suicide bombings against Israeli, U.S., and even French targets between 1983 and 1988 and is often cited as a major impediment to the Middle East peace process.¹⁶³ Another such organization sponsored by Iran is the Islamic Resistance Movement (commonly referred to as Hamas). This organization is a Palestinian social and political organization known to also possess a radical military wing. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, and Mohammad Taha created Hamas in 1987 during a Palestinian uprising against Israel that came to be known as “The First Intifada.” Hamas has ties to not only Iran, but the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt as well. They are best known for two things: (1) attacks against Israel involving suicide operations, rockets, and shootings; and (2) their transformation into a political organization that won control of the Palestinian Parliament during elections in 2006. Further, Iran is also accused of providing operational support and guidance to the Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK) and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Chapter 10, Article 154, *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*.

¹⁶² Brian Jackson et al, *Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 2: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups* (Santa Monica, RAND, 2005), 38–39.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 70 and 191.

¹⁶⁴ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 112.

Al Qaeda (The Base) is the terrorist organization that comes to mind for most Americans in the post September 11, 2001 world. They are of interest here for two primary reasons: (1) they are a well financed, global organization that advocates attacks against the U.S. and (2) they have expressed an interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁵ These two factors make it logical to explore an Iran-Al Qaeda relationship. Despite cultural and linguistic ties between Iran and Afghanistan, there is little common ground between the two countries. Iran did oppose Soviet occupation of Afghanistan beginning in 1979 and provided support to the *mujahedeen* (struggler or one who struggles in a *jihād*) during the Soviet occupation, but Iran later rejected the *Taliban* (students) regime that eventually consolidated power and took over the government implementing a harsh interpretation of *Sharia* (Islamic law). The Taliban were the protectors of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda prior to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime both represent a fundamentalist interpretation of Sunni Islam known as *Wahhabism*.¹⁶⁶ Despite the commonalities of anti-Westernism and anti-secularism, the Wahhabi orientation of Sunni Islam represents an anti-Shi'ite school of thought characterized by religious fundamentalism that is not compatible with Iranian Shi'ite ideology, thereby making an alliance between Al Qaeda and Iran not very likely.¹⁶⁷ Much of Iran's rhetoric and support of terrorist organizations stems from the Sunni-Shi'a schism that split Islam in its early years. Saudi Arabia launched an anti-Shi'a campaign following the Iranian Revolution with the intent of containing the radical forces of Shi'ism unleashed by Khomeini in 1979: Iran's efforts can be viewed as a rational, yet asymmetric reaction to such efforts.¹⁶⁸ It is also interesting to note that the largest pro-American rally conducted

¹⁶⁵ Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*, 77–78.

¹⁶⁶ "Wahhabism" is often synonymous with "Salafism" (from Salafi: "predecessors" referring to the early Muslim leaders. Both represent an "Islamic revivalist social movement." Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 63.

¹⁶⁷ Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 2004), 60.

¹⁶⁸ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 104–105.

outside the U.S. following the September 11, 2001, attacks took place in Tehran: a key indication of Iranian animosity toward Al Qaeda and their Sunni fundamentalist supporters.¹⁶⁹

C. STATE SPONSORSHIP OF NUCLEAR TERRORISM

Before addressing state sponsorship of nuclear weapons for terrorists, it is important to ask if terrorist would need such sponsorship. Richard Falkenrath, Robert Newman, and Bradley Thayer argue that nonstate actors may not even need state sponsorship to acquire nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons for several reasons.¹⁷⁰ First, an expansion of technical and scientific knowledge, supported by educational opportunities and the Internet, make reliance on state sponsorship less necessary today than in the past. This does not completely negate the fact there “remain[s] substantial technical difficulties in acquiring, weaponizing and delivering effective WMD.”¹⁷¹ Second (though possibly a dated observation), controls over materials necessary for the fabrication of weapons of mass destruction are looser now than during the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to gaps through which flowed the nuclear, biological, and chemical components necessary to make weapons of mass destruction. While controls have been tightened up with U.S. help and especially following the events of September 11, 2001, a full chain of custody for many of these materials is not available. The limited shelf life of such components eases some of the worry in this respect, but does not completely eliminate it. Finally, terrorists may not need such destructive weapons since conventional weapons are cheaper, more accessible, highly effective, and not likely to carry the same consequences as attacks with nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. As Walter Laqueur points out:

¹⁶⁹ Richard Klass, “Time To Treat Iranians Like Real Folks,” Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Online, http://www.armscontrolcenter.org/policy/iran/articles/021709_treat_iranians_real/ (accessed May 13, 2009).

¹⁷⁰ Richard Falkenrath, Robert Newman, and Bradley Thayer, *America’s Achilles Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 167–178.

¹⁷¹ Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, “Everything That Descends Must Converge: Terrorism, Globalism and Democracy,” *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*, Andrew Silke, ed. (New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 80.

Broadly speaking, terrorists will not engage in overkill if their traditional weapons—the submachine gun and the conventional bomb—are sufficient to continue the struggle and achieve their aims.¹⁷²

While this may not be true in all cases, especially in cases of apocalyptic millenarian terrorists, it generally applies to the groups Iran currently provides support. Mark Juergensmeyer notes that “the primary purpose of religious violence is not to coerce particular concessions, but to fulfill a spiritual requirement.”¹⁷³ These terrorists are working to see “fulfillment in some transtemporal realm” rather than the objective changes Iran desires to see in the Middle East today.¹⁷⁴ “Groups such as Hamas, Hizballah, and Islamic Jihad [all groups sponsored by Iran]...do not make the list of potential superterrorists:” that is, they are not likely to desire, acquire, or employ WMD in pursuit of their goals.¹⁷⁵

Many opponents of the Iranian nuclear program cite state sponsorship of terrorism, on-going conflict with Israel, and threats to spread radical ideology as the primary motives for forcing Iran to cease its nuclear activities, yet there are historical and theoretical models that illustrate why Iran may not use nuclear technology for any of these reasons. Iran, despite rhetoric and ideology, is a state and states pursue rational actions.¹⁷⁶ States must conduct cost/benefit analyses of actions prior to undertaking them and act according to its best interests in terms of security and power. While many states have sponsored terrorist groups in the past, no states have ever passed nuclear weapons to them.¹⁷⁷ Even at the height of the Cold War and despite support to extremist organizations, neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. provided nuclear weapons to nonstate actors. If two of the greatest antagonists in modern history refrained from such reckless

¹⁷² Walter Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 75, No. 5 (September/October 1996), 31.

¹⁷³ Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Logic of Religious Violence,” *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, David Rappaport, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 185–190.

¹⁷⁴ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 220–221.

¹⁷⁵ Ehud Sprinzak, “The Great Superterrorism Scare,” *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1998), 110–124.

¹⁷⁶ Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat*; and Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*.

¹⁷⁷ Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*, 228.

acts in the midst of their ideological conflict and desire to spread their visions of world order, then why would Iran be any different? Additionally, despite the extreme rhetoric directed at Israel by Iranian leaders and support to terrorist organizations that target Israeli interests provided by Iran, Israel has never employed nuclear weapons against its enemies. If Israel, a state identified by a religious, as well as a secular identity, has refrained from employing nuclear weapons, why would we expect Iran to be any different? Finally, all ideologies are reflections of a given worldview; therefore conflicting ideologies are considered radical when viewed from a competing worldview. For example, the spread of communism represented a potential threat to the U.S. during the Cold War, while concepts such as radical Sunni Islam and regime change represent a potential threat to Iran today. If the U.S. was not willing to resort to the use of nuclear weapons in order to counter the communist threat, why would Iran have to resort to nuclear weapons to overcome its potential threats?

In order to objectively address Iranian nuclear ambitions, it is necessary to establish the most likely scenarios for employment of Iranian nuclear weapons and evaluate their likelihood. One such scenario in which Iranian nuclear weapons could be used is one involving the use of surrogates to carry out attacks. States have not employed this tactic thus far for the same basic reason that states have not directly employed nuclear weapons as discussed in the previous chapter: the cost is too high. Through forensics and intelligence, it is unlikely that such an act could be kept secret; therefore it would invite the same retribution as a direct nuclear strike. Additionally, as Falkenrath and his colleagues point out, another significant issue to consider when addressing state sponsorship of nuclear terrorism is control.

State sponsors of international terrorism lack perfect control over the groups they support and are therefore unwilling to run the enormous risks associated with assisting them to acquire weapons of mass destruction.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Falkenrath, Newman, and Thayer, *America's Achilles Heel*, 219–220.

This point is expanded upon and reinforced by Laqueur:

Governments, however ruthless, ambitious, and ideologically extreme, will be reluctant to pass on unconventional weapons to terrorist groups over which they cannot have full control; the governments may be tempted to use such arms themselves in a first strike, but it is more probable that they would employ them in blackmail than in actual warfare.¹⁷⁹

No matter how committed the leadership of the state is to their ideology, they must take actions that will provide for the survival of the regime. Employment of nuclear weapons either directly or indirectly risks the survivability of the regime, especially in cases of smaller, more lightly armed states such as Iran will likely be for the foreseeable future, and therefore neither scenario appears very likely.

Iran's ambition, after all, is to become the region's undisputed power; given its tendency to view all other actors as potential competitors, it's hardly likely Tehran would undermine its goal by sharing sensitive technology.¹⁸⁰

D. THE PAKISTANI MODEL

In order to apply these assumptions about nuclear weapons to a real world example, one must now examine Pakistan. Pakistan entered the nuclear weapons club in 1992, when it announced that it had achieved the know-how to build a nuclear bomb. This was in direct response to perceived threats from India, its nuclear next-door neighbor.¹⁸¹ The two states have been rivals ever since their creation following the division of the Indian sub-continent by Britain in 1947, a process that led to one-half million deaths as the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu populations shifted to one state or the other.¹⁸² Both have made overt and veiled threats to use their nuclear weapons against one another during several tense times as the two states dealt with conflicts ranging from Kashmir to religion to territorial boundaries. The two first went to war in 1947 following

¹⁷⁹ Laqueur, "Postmodern Terrorism," 34.

¹⁸⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 271.

¹⁸¹ Gordon Corera, *Shopping For Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the A. Q. Khan Network* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

allegations of Pakistani support for a Muslim insurrection in Kashmir. A United Nations brokered cease fire took effect in 1949, but disputes continue to this day over the region including additional conventional wars in 1965 and 1971, as well as an insurgency in 1989. In the 1990s, nuclear weapons became a major concern as the two powers embarked on a nuclear arms race to extend their capabilities and apparently acquire an advantage over the other. Devin Hagerty identifies three key motivations for both India and Pakistan's drive toward nuclear weapons: national security, international respect, and domestic politics.¹⁸³ In 1999, the two countries again went to war. The conflict remained conventional most likely due to the costly nature of escalation to a nuclear conflict, as well as international intervention to help broker a cease fire. This supports Waltz's assertions that the spread of nuclear weapons will actually facilitate restraint by states and prevent conventional war from escalating into nuclear war.

An indirect employment scenario is more difficult to illustrate, but is present none the less. Pakistan is a complex country. Its leaders first developed a formal constitution in 1956, but it remained in place for only two years before being suspended by General Ayub Khan. A second attempt to govern via constitutional processes went into effect in 1973, but lasted only until 1977. The Pakistani military has played a dominant role in the political process through most of its history with military officers serving as President roughly 23 out of its 62 years of existence. This is not surprising since the Pakistani military is the seventh largest in the world and the population has struggled with poverty, dissatisfaction with political leadership, and frequent threats from its neighbors. Pakistan is predominantly a Muslim country (roughly 95% of its population is Muslim) and most of its conflicts have been tied to religion (such is the case in direct conflict with India and volunteer support of Muslims against Israel and the U.S.S.R.). Dissatisfaction with leadership has recently resulted from Pakistan's increasingly moderate stance. Many Pakistani scientists, military officers, and religious leaders objected to former President Pervez Musharraf's (himself a general who seized power from a democratically elected leader) support of the U.S. in the Global War on Terror, as well as the decreasing

¹⁸³ Devin Hagerty, "The South Asian Nuclear Tests: Implications for Arms Control," *The Politics of Nuclear Non-Proliferation*, Carl Ungerer and Marianne Hanson, eds. (Canberra: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 98.

importance their country plays in the Islamic world. Many of them felt that they had a duty to elevate Islamic Civilization to a level equal to or greater than that of Christian, Jewish, and Hindu Civilizations.¹⁸⁴ This is manifested by the desire of many of these scientists to share nuclear technology with all Muslims, even Al Qaeda, in order to provide “a bomb for the *Ummah*” (a community of believers, especially Muslim believers around the world).¹⁸⁵

Gordon Corera highlights the story of Sultan Bashiruddin Mahood¹⁸⁶ and Abdul Majeed, two former Pakistani nuclear scientists who are known for their Islamic fundamentalist zeal and their arrest by Pakistani authorities for meeting with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in 2001.¹⁸⁷ The meeting with Osama bin Laden allegedly centered on their Islamic identity and their desire to spread nuclear technology beyond Pakistan to other Islamic countries. They are also said to have discussed how to make a nuclear bomb, how to employ nuclear materials Al Qaeda had already acquired (allegedly obtained from contacts in the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), and the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction.¹⁸⁸ They, and several of their colleagues from Pakistan’s military and intellectual societies, possessed a wealth of technical knowledge about the fabrication and delivery of nuclear weapons, yet there is no evidence to suggest that any of their meetings resulted in anything other than speculation and theory. Mahood himself described the meetings as “academic.”¹⁸⁹ His son, commenting on the meeting, noted that it was a very straightforward discussion:

Basically Osama asked my father, ‘How can a nuclear bomb be made, and can you help us make one?’ Mahood is said to have told bin Laden that it would be very difficult to build a bomb.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*, 21.

¹⁸⁵ David Albright and Holly Higgins, “A Bomb for the Ummah,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol. 59, No. 2 (March–April 2003), 49.

¹⁸⁶ His name appears as “Mahood” in some texts and “Mahmood” in others.

¹⁸⁷ Corera, *Shopping For Bombs*, 162–163.

¹⁸⁸ Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Corera, *Shopping For Bombs*, 162–163.

Additionally, despite the high level of these individuals and their access to the Pakistani nuclear program, there is no indication of complicity on the part of the government of Pakistan in arranging, sponsoring, or even allowing the meeting with Al Qaeda to take place. This is the case because Pakistan knows the risks associated with transfer of nuclear weapons to intermediaries: the same risks that will restrain Iran.

The Pakistani nuclear program is infamous for its proliferation aspect. Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the “Father of Pakistan’s Nuclear Bomb,” built a now famous black market empire based on the nuclear trade.¹⁹¹ His customers are known to have included such countries as Iran, North Korea, and Libya.¹⁹² Former Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet remarked that “Khan and his network had been unique in being able to offer one-stop shopping for enrichment technology and weapons design information.”¹⁹³ Such activities may have been the result of an individual motivated by idealism or financial greed, or they may have been an officially directed program of cooperation and fundraising directed by the Pakistani government itself.¹⁹⁴ Either way, the proliferation was limited to states: no nonstate actors have as yet acquired nuclear weapons through state sponsorship, independent methods (though Al Qaeda has approached various scientists in an effort to do so¹⁹⁵), or through theft (though the Red Army Faction did attempt the theft of nuclear weapons from U.S. forces in Germany in 1977¹⁹⁶).

In terms of passing nuclear weapons to nonstate actors, Pakistan is the closest country to which Iran can be compared for several reasons. First, Pakistan is the only Islamic state to develop nuclear weapons. This is significant considering Iran is a

¹⁹¹ Jonathan Schell, *The Seventh Decade: The New Shape of Nuclear Danger* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 45.

¹⁹² Jafarzadeh, *The Iranian Threat*, 133.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁹⁴ Pakistan officially denies knowledge of or involvement with Khan’s activities, while Khan states that he was made a “scapegoat” by the Pakistani government. See Associated Press Report, “Pakistani Says Army Knew Atomic Parts Were Shipped,” *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/05/world/asia/05pstan.html?_r=1 (accessed May 15, 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*, 20–24.

¹⁹⁶ See Falkenrath, Newman, and Thayer, *America’s Achilles Heel*, 31–32; and Andrew and Leslie Cockburn, *One Point Safe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 1–9.

theocratic regime with Shi'a Islam at its heart and a publically stated desire to export the principles of the Iranian Revolution to freedom fighters around the world. Second, Pakistan has a long history of ties to radical state and nonstate actors such as the Afghanistan mujahedeen during the Soviet occupation, the Taliban regime that ruled Afghanistan 1996 through 2001, and numerous allegations of Pakistani intelligence connections with radical elements in Kashmir. Iran has long been recognized as a major supporter of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and various sectarian groups in Iraq. Finally, both Pakistan and India, its regional rival, possess nuclear weapons and have been involved in on-going overt and covert military conflict for an extended period. Iran's primary regional rival is Israel: a country that is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons and a history of both overt and covert conflict with Iran. Religious orientation, ties to extremists, and unbalanced regional rivalries all combine to provide a solid case for a Pakistan-Iran comparison. In this thesis, Pakistan is considered to be a theoretical model rather than a historical model because of their short time as a nuclear power and the evolving nature of their power structure. Inferences about correlations between Pakistan and Iran must be made on the relatively short trends in Pakistan, rather than a long standing, relatively stable political structure like the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. possessed during the Cold War.

Further predictions about Iranian nuclear support for terrorism can be made by looking at the U.S.-Soviet relationship during the Cold War. Specifically, while the conflict was waged across the globe through various intermediaries, neither country ever transferred nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons to terrorists of any ideological milieu. This is significant because both sides supported insurgent groups that could easily be labeled terrorists, yet their support stopped short of providing weapons of mass destruction. This is an important additional variable to consider when assessing the possibility of Iranian support for nuclear terrorism. As Graham Allison points out:

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union each knew that an attack against the other would elicit a retaliatory strike of commensurate or greater measure; but [Al Qaeda has] no such fear of reprisal.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Allison, "Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Terrorism," 68.

The country that provides them, or any other terrorist organization, nuclear materials should however have fear of reprisal, as well as isolation from the international community. This is likely the very same rationale that has prevented Iran from passing chemical weapons to any of its surrogates.¹⁹⁸ These are outcomes divergent from those desired by countries such as India, Pakistan, and Iran: national security, international respect, and domestic politics. Allison argues that a more comprehensive structure is necessary to add greater credibility to the deterrence aspect of preventing nuclear terrorism, but a rudimentary system is in existence now.¹⁹⁹

E. INDIRECT EMPLOYMENT CONCLUSIONS

As previously established, Iran is a rational state and will likely act in accordance with certain basic rules. States are unitary actors that calculate the risks and benefits of actions prior to making decisions, then choose the most beneficial course of action in recognition of the reality of an anarchical international system, and the need to pursue security through power.²⁰⁰ Iran has a long history of supporting terrorist organizations for strategic reasons: is it possible that they would consider expanding this support to include nuclear weapons? If they are such a willing supplier of arms, equipment, and training for nonnuclear terrorism, then why would they restrain themselves from adding nuclear support to the list? For the same reason that they would not employ nuclear weapons directly: the cost outweighs the benefit. As Richard Erickson puts it, “states that tolerate international terrorism are liable under state responsibility” for their actions.²⁰¹ Nuclear forensics and intelligence make it possible, though not completely certain, that the origins of such a device would be traced to the sponsoring state, thereby making that state vulnerable for retaliation.²⁰² “The risk of detection and subsequent severe retaliation or punishment is great, and while this may not deter terrorists it may put off their

¹⁹⁸ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 270.

¹⁹⁹ Allison, “Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Terrorism,” 72.

²⁰⁰ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 27–28.

²⁰¹ Richard Erickson, *Legitimate Use of Military Force Against State-Sponsored International Terrorism* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1989), 100.

²⁰² Allison, “Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Terrorism,” 72–73.

sponsors and suppliers.”²⁰³ Due to uncertainty about the reliability of their intermediaries, possible retaliation from the targeted state, and the availability of reasonable alternatives to weapons of mass destruction for terrorists, state sponsorship of nuclear terrorism is not a likely or rational possibility for Iran to employ in order to pursue its national interests.

²⁰³ Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism,” 24–37.

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VI. ASSESSING THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVIEWED

This thesis addressed two specific concerns in regard to Iran and its development of nuclear technology: does Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons represent a direct threat to the (1) defense and (2) security of the U.S. homeland? It considered how likely the Iranian regime is to directly attack the U.S. with nuclear weapons, as well as the likelihood that Iranian nuclear materiel could be distributed to terrorists that would seek to detonate them within the U.S. Neither of these scenarios appears to be likely so long as the U.S. maintains a credible strategic nuclear deterrent capability and clearly communicates its retaliation policy for both itself and its allies.

The conflict between the U.S. and Iran is rooted in Iran's national identity and in Western interference in the internal affairs of Iran throughout the twentieth century.

Seen from the Iranian historical perspective, neither alliance nor neutrality, nor engagement has saved Iran from the designs of its foes. If Iranians are to unlearn the lessons of their history, those responsible for teaching the lessons ought to rethink their ways.²⁰⁴

This is important because it establishes not only who Iran is, but why the U.S. has had a hard time dealing with this country in the twentieth century and beyond. A better understanding of Iran's culture and history provides a better foundation upon which to make an assessment to address the overall research question. Ultimately, current U.S.-Iranian hostility has its roots in Western manipulation of Iran throughout the twentieth century and the resentment this creates among the Iranian regime and citizenry due to their perceptions as a great power in the Middle East. Would the current situation be different if the U.S. had not chosen a course of action to remove Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953?

²⁰⁴ Mokhtari, "No One Will Scratch My Back," 229.

We can only speculate on what might have been if Mossadegh had remained in power, but it is clear that America's support of the shah engendered deep resentment.²⁰⁵

Iran's wealth of natural resources and strategic location has given it many blessings, yet they have also kept it in the sights of Western industrial powers. Iranian nationalism combined with Shi'ism has led to the emergence of a people full of pride and a desire for self-determination that often challenges Western ideas for the role and direction of the Middle East.²⁰⁶ By reviewing the origins of the modern Iranian state, the turbulence of the twentieth century, and exploring the unique relationship between the U.S. and Iran in regard to the Iranian nuclear program, one can see the roots of conflict that have dug deep into the public perception and foreign policy of both countries. In the case of the U.S. and Iran, "each protagonist is prisoner of its history, which is what makes it deaf to the other side's grievances."²⁰⁷

Iran is likely pursuing nuclear weapons, or at least an option to quickly produce a nuclear weapon if sufficiently threatened by the U.S., Israel, or its Sunni Arab neighbors. Iran's motivations for nuclear technology stem from its desire for security, prestige, etc. Such motivations lend credence to the notion that Iran is a rational state and is likely to pursue national interests over ideological zeal. It also suggests that the likelihood of deterring Iran from developing a nuclear weapons option is not likely despite some lingering hope.²⁰⁸ This is significant because if it is pursuing an immediate or future weapons capability, one must ask if Iran can be deterred from directly employing such weapons or passing them on to terrorist organizations. While it appears clear that the U.S. is not looking for another fight, the Iranians likely are looking to shift the advantage in their favor if a fight does come, especially if the fight is from the U.S., Israel, or Pakistan. A nuclear armed Iran is not likely to result in an immediate war, but it will likely result in a shift in the balance of power in the Middle East: a shift the Iranians will

²⁰⁵ Shore, *Blunder*, 78.

²⁰⁶ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 81.

²⁰⁷ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 2.

²⁰⁸ "The challenge is to persuade Iran diplomatically that it should confine itself to a non-nuclear status." Henderson, "Iran's Nuclear Program," 2.

capitalize on in order to assert themselves more forcefully onto the regional and world stages in order to reassert their perceived rightful place in the world order.

Chapter III reviewed the current U.S.-Iranian situation in order to develop an objective understanding of what is known about Iran's nuclear program from a historical and contemporary perspective, while exploring the back and forth between critics and supporters of the most current National Intelligence Estimate on Iran conducted in 2007. In doing so, it has concluded that the 2007 estimate likely underestimates Iran's capability and intent regarding nuclear weapons. In evaluating support and opposition for U.S. intelligence estimates of Iran, and seeing the issue from the Iranian perspective, it is likely that Iran is on its way to obtaining nuclear weapons in pursuit of pride, prestige, regional leadership, and security.²⁰⁹

Existing theories of deterrence are based on the rationality of the parties involved; therefore, if Iran is not a rational actor in the classical sense, then existing theories will not provide an accurate framework from which to develop courses of action in dealing with them. There has been tremendous debate within both the scholarly and policy making communities' regarding Iran's perceived efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and the possible ramifications of such a move. While Iran has a history of provocative action and confrontation with the West, their acquisition of nuclear technologies (civil or military) can be explained in terms of normal state behavior based on the assumption that Iran is a rational actor and a new multi-polar world order is emerging. Since both Iranian foreign and domestic policy demonstrates a balance of pragmatism and idealism supporting the conclusion that they are rational actors, then their reasons for pursuing nuclear weapons capability can be understood.

The debate about pragmatism and rationality in Iranian foreign policy was explored in order to help develop this consideration. From Iran's perspective, nuclear weapons may provide protection from regional and global forces that exert pressure to constrain their actions. Such pressures likely include Iran's encirclement by the U.S., the Israeli nuclear weapons program, the Pakistani nuclear weapons program, domestic

²⁰⁹ Fitzpatrick, "Lessons Learned from Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons," 535.

motivations, and the growing notion that to be a great power, a state must possess nuclear weapons.²¹⁰ Iran has been forced to endure both international sanctions and threats of attack since 1979: keeping this in mind, it is logical for them to seek an effective means of increasing their state security and international standing through nuclear technology. Since Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons capabilities are easily understood in terms of countering real or perceived threats to the state, increasing state prominence in the international community, and attainment of hegemonic power in the Middle East, then they are truly rational actors, thus historical and theoretical models can be applied to assess their potential threat to the U.S. Even the incendiary rhetoric common from Iranian President Ahmadinejad is motivated by a shrewd political motivation: it is a direct appeal to the sentiments common on the Arab street. Such appeals establish Iran as the leading defender of Islam against the forces of the West and thereby inhibit the ability of Sunni rivals to take action against Iran for fear of reprisal from their own populations.²¹¹

The appearance that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons does not mean that it has a specific intent to employ such weapons immediately, nor does it necessarily mean that a future transfer of such weapons to terrorists is imminent. Direct use of a nuclear weapon against the continental U.S.; against American military forces in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia; or against U.S. allies in the region or around the globe is not a likely course of action for Iran. This is the case because there is a very high probability that they would face a debilitating counter-strike. Models of deterrence exist to contain direct and indirect usage of nuclear weapons, but if Iranian motivations differ from those of historical actors, then previous understanding about the rules of nuclear brinkmanship may not apply. This raises the final problem addressed in the thesis: can Iran be deterred from using nuclear weapons? Since Iran appears to be a rational actor in its pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, then Cold War models, augmented by contemporary studies directed toward specifically toward Iran, provide a framework for an Iranian deterrence strategy. In evaluating the possibility of Iranian direct use of nuclear weapons, a review

²¹⁰ Kadhim, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," 584-586.

²¹¹ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 265.

of the historical model of the U.S.-Soviet relationship during the Cold War provided a compelling case why Iran can likely be deterred from employing such weapons in a direct manner. The Soviet-American relationship during the Cold War is very similar to the U.S.-Iranian relationship today, but despite Soviet-American animosity toward one another, numerous opportunities for conflict, and extreme divergence of ideology, there was never a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union: the same will likely be the case between the U.S. and Iran. For Iran, the purpose of nuclear weapons is clearly deterrence against coercion by rival states and increased state security: they are not an offensive military option.

Iran is not likely to pass nuclear weapons to terrorist organizations for mainly the same reasons they are not likely to employ them in a direct manner. Iran's motivations and rationality will prevent such a reckless policy from being employed.

Iran's rationality may also be the reason why thus far it has not shared chemical or biological weapons with any of its Arab proxies such as Hezbollah, and why a nuclear Iran likely would not share nuclear weapons with terrorist groups.²¹²

Iran desires to be a player on the regional stage: passing nuclear weapons to terrorists would lead to international ostracism and run contrary to Iran's goals as a rising power. Iranian rationality would also lead to a cost/benefit analysis resulting in the conclusion that such a move would be just as dangerous as a direct attack with nuclear weapons. As stated in Chapter V, states that facilitate international terrorism are responsible for the actions of their intermediaries. Iran would pay a price for such actions that would be completely contrary to its objectives.²¹³ Nuclear forensics techniques and intelligence operations make it possible, though not absolutely certain, that the device would be traced back to its origins, thereby enabling retaliatory action.²¹⁴ Due to questions about the reliability of their proxies, threats of retaliation, and reasonable alternatives to WMD, Iranian support for nuclear terrorism is neither a likely nor rational possibility in pursuit of its national interests.

²¹² Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 270.

²¹³ Erickson, *Legitimate Use of Military Force Against State-Sponsored International Terrorism*, 100.

²¹⁴ Allison, "Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Terrorism," 72.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

With all of this in mind, a reasonable policy recommendation for the U.S. to consider is to allow Iran to pursue nuclear technology up to and including nuclear weapons. “Sometimes diplomacy is no substitute for force,” according to Zachary Shore, but military action in this case should not be necessary.²¹⁵ Many Iranians feel that there is a way ahead that involves a reciprocal relationship of respect and recognition between the U.S. and Iran. One such Iranian is Ali Larjani, a noted Iranian politician and philosopher, who states that:

[Iran] has a right to nuclear technology ... [but] a country’s survival depends on its political and diplomatic ties. You can’t live isolation ... the government must pursue the national demand for nuclear technology, but must make use of diplomatic tools as well ... [Larjani] still believes such controversial issues can be resolved within the context of negotiations ... [but] everything depends on the way [the Iranians] are treated.²¹⁶

In line with the International Crisis Group’s thinking, the U.S. should respect Iran’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect the Islamic regime, acknowledge Iran’s regional role, and use the current nuclear issue as a test case for future relations between the U.S. and Iran.²¹⁷ This would create a situation in which both Waltz’s theory of stability through nuclear weapons would be applied in the real world and we could see “the start of a long-term dialog that minimizes risks of confrontation and advances areas of mutual interest.”²¹⁸ This would shift the military balance of power in the Middle East away from Israel, thus creating an unaccustomed position for Israel and possibly unsettling the nerves of America’s Sunni allies in the region, but would put the U.S. in a more balanced position within the region. After all, as Trita Parsi says:

²¹⁵ Shore, *Blunder*, 23.

²¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?* Middle East Report No. 51 (February 23, 2006), 8.

²¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 7–9.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Washington has sought to establish an order that contradicts the natural balance by seeking to contain and isolate Iran, one of the most powerful countries of the region.²¹⁹

This does however present the risk of an arms race in the Middle East. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt may be tempted to undertake nuclear weapons programs of their own to ensure their security as a result of the Shi'a-Sunni and "Persian-Arab" divides between Iran and its neighbors.²²⁰ This risk is present if Iran develops nuclear weapons with or without U.S. acquiescence, therefore it would be in the U.S.' best interests to act based on a worst-case scenario approach. U.S. involvement right now might also persuade them to forgo their own nuclear ambitions in exchange for the extension of a strategic nuclear umbrella from the U.S.

Since Iran is likely pursuing nuclear weapons in order to establish a deterrent against aggression from hostile international or regional players, a reasonable way-ahead is to offer them some degree of security in order to decrease their perceived need for nuclear weapons. The likely red lines for Iran's employment of nuclear weapons primarily involve either retaliation for a nuclear first strike and external efforts toward removal of the current regime. For these reasons, all negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue should include both an articulation of the U.S. policy of not being the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict and consideration of Iranian resentment for previous Western actions against Iran's governments.²²¹

Additionally, there are benefits that could be reaped from U.S. acceptance of a nuclear-armed Iran, and that would be the creation of an alliance between the two states. As noted by the International Crisis Group:

²¹⁹ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 262.

²²⁰ Parsi, "Israel and the Origins of Iran's Arab Option," 493.

²²¹ Scott Sagan asserts that a "no first-strike policy" should be adopted by the U.S. in relation to all potential adversaries. Sagan, "The Case for No First Use," 163.

Washington has much to gain by Iranian cooperation in its two Middle Eastern battlefields, Iraq and Afghanistan—and as much to lose by Iranian hostility...There is also an apparent convergence of interests on important regional questions—Iraq’s territorial integrity and stability; keeping the Taliban at bay in Afghanistan; stopping the flow of narcotics across the Afghan border.²²²

U.S. acknowledgement of Iran’s regional leadership position, rising power status, and right to nuclear weapons would be a big step toward normalization between the countries. Mutually beneficial economic and political ties could be created between the two in order to decrease America dependence on its current oil providing partners, keep China at bay in the Middle East,²²³ an additional partner in the Islamic world, as well as a potential counter-balance to Israeli power in the region and a willing partner in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Would such an alliance be popular within Iranian borders? It very likely would be:

According to most polling and anecdotal evidence, the vast majority of Iranians are not hostile to the U.S. and, for some time, have been eager for dialog and the restoration of normal ties.²²⁴

Such a move on the part of the U.S. would decrease international tensions, provide the Iranian regime with a sense of security it has lacked for thirty years, potentially restart the Middle East peace process, and open both the U.S. and Iran up for increased economic, military, and cultural cooperation. Conversely, continuation of the present course of action could reinforce anti-American sentiment among the Iranian people and drive them toward continued support of the current Iranian regime. As noted by the International Crisis Group, “the greater tensions are with Washington, the easier it is for the regime to rally supporters, suppress dissent and invoke national unity against a common enemy.”²²⁵

²²² International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 1.

²²³ “The U.S. could benefit from a powerful Iran serving as a buffer against Chinese access to Persian Gulf and Caspian Basin energy resources, just as Iran had served as a buffer against the Soviet Union before the collapse of Communism.” Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 261.

²²⁴ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement*, 3.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

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